

HEROINES OF INDIA

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DECCAN NURSERY TALES, THE INDIAN HEROES,

TALES FROM THE INDIAN EPICS,

HISTORY OF THE MARATHA PEOPLE,

TALES OF THE INDIAN CAVALIERS, ETC ETC

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To
SIR STANLEY REID, K B E , M.P.
AS A SLIGHT RETURN FOR MANY
ACTS OF KINDNESS AND MUCH ENCOURAGEMENT
IN THE PAST
THIS LITTLE BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED BY THE AUTHOR

PREFACE

The first two chapters in this little book are taken from the world's greatest epic the *Mahabharata*. "The Queen of the Anardes" is a Gujarat folk-tale sent to me twenty years ago from the Panch Mahals by an Indian friend. The story of "Jasma the Odan" will be found in Forbes' *Rasmale* and is well known in Kathiawar and Gujarat proper. The tale of "Shakti the Jhalin" was recited to me in Gujarati verse some forty years ago by a Charan or bard in the service of the Jhala Thakor Sahib of Wadhwan. The adventures of Queen Kauladevi are given at great length by Mr. Nandashankar in his wonderful historical novel *Karan Ghelo*. Chandbibi, Nur Jahan, Jijabai Bhosle, are all historical characters. The tragedy of Krishna Kumari of Mewar has been admirably related in Tod's *Rajasthan*.

"The Princess Savitri" and "Damayanti" are reprinted by the kind permission of the Oxford University Press. "The Queen of the Anardes" has already been printed under another title in the *Times of India Annual* for 1920, and I am obliged to the Editor for permission to republish it.

C. A. K.

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I

THE PRINCESS SAVITRI

The Princess Savitri was the daughter of Aswapati, king of the Madwa people, and was the loveliest maiden in all India ; but she was so tall and stately that the princes of India were overawed by her imperial beauty and none dared to ask for her hand. At last her father bade her drive up and down the land of the Aryas and choose for herself some youth fit to be her husband. Savitri blushed deeply but obeyed. She seated herself in her father's chariot and drove out to visit the various courts and shrines of India.

She was absent for several months. While she was away the sage Narada came to King Aswapati's court. The king greeted him with proper respect, and as they were talking together, a messenger came to announce the return of Savitri. Naturally Narada asked where she had been and why she was still unmarried. The king told him, and just then the princess herself

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entered the palace. After she had greeted her father he bade her tell them whether she had found herself a fitting husband and if so who he was

The princess's rounded cheeks grew red for a moment then she said "My father there ruled some years ago in the land of the Salyas a noble king named Dyumatsena. While he was still in the prime of life and his son a tiny boy the king's eyes failed him and he became blind. Hearing of this a neighbouring king suddenly attacked the Salya kingdom overthrew the royal army and forced the king to flee with his queen and the little prince into the forest. There Dyumatsena became a hermit and renounced the world. His son, Satyavan by name, has now grown into a splendid prince. I have seen him and I love him and he alone shall be my husband."

So saying the beautiful princess bowed before her father and the great sage Narada, until her head touched their feet.

"Alas!" exclaimed Narada. "Your daughter O King has made but a foolish choice."

"Venerable sage," said the king anxiously "is not Prince Satyavan wise and brave and handsome?"

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"He is indeed," said Narada. "The prince is all that you could desire, but he has one defect that outweighs all his virtues. Exactly one year from to-day Prince Satyavan's life will end."

"O my daughter," cried the king, "choose another husband, for if you wed Satyavan, in a few months you will be a widow."

"No, my father," said Savitri, "my love once given can never be given to another. I chose the prince for my husband and him only shall I wed."

The courage of the beautiful maid touched Narada's heart

"O King," he said, "the maid will never wed anyone but Satyavan. Let her therefore take him for a husband."

The king bowed before the sage and said "As you will, venerable sir, so shall it be."

The same day Narada took his leave, and King Aswapati began to prepare for his daughter's wedding. On an auspicious day he gathered round him the wisest Brahmans of the realm, and taking his daughter, he set out in his chariot for the hermitage of Dyumatsena. When they reached the forest, he left his chariot and walked on foot until

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he found the king seated on a mat of Kusa grass in the shade of a teak tree Aswapati bowed and told the royal hermit who he was and the object of his coming Dyumatsena at first demurred to the marriage.

How will your daughter " he asked bear the hardships of the forest ? In the old days when I was king of the Salyas I would gladly have accepted your offer but to-day when I am but a poor forest hermit how can I ?"

I have set my heart on the marriage" replied Aswapati Pray therefore do not thwart me "

If that be so let the wedding be this very day "

Aswapati agreed and with the help of the Brahmans who had accompanied the king of the Madwas and those who lived round the hermitage they united Satyavan and the beautiful Princess Savitri that very day

That she might not shame her father-in law Savitri cast aside her ornaments and her silken garments and clothed herself in bark and coarse red rags She soon won the love of her husband's people and all day long she thought of nothing else but how to please them Yet a dark

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shadow hung over her happiness, for she could not forget the words that the sage Narada had uttered, namely that Satyavan must die within a year. At last the appointed time was only three days off, and Savitri, in the hope of moving the immortals, vowed that she would touch no food until Satyavan had survived the hour fixed for his death. At last the day itself dawned.

Suddenly the prince rose and, taking a hatchet, set forth for the forest.

"Wait, my husband," cried Savitri. "Let me go with you. To-day I cannot leave you."

Satyavan tried to dissuade her. "You are weak with fasting and the paths are steep and rugged," but her love overcame her weakness and she earnestly begged the prince not to forbid her. Satyavan at last consented and told her to bid the king and queen farewell, for he feared that she might die of fatigue in the forest. Savitri went to them and explained that she must be at her lord's side on his last day of life. Nor could she beg him not to go into the forest, for he wished to cut wood for the sacrificial fire. The king and queen understood and, blessing her, they bade her take every care for Satyavan.

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Savitri joined the prince and they went into the woods together

The prince was gay and pointed out to Savitri the streams sparkling in the sunlight, the flowering shrubs and the peacocks in the tall leafy trees. Savitri's heart was heavy but the prince, forgetting his peril, climbed into the trees and plucked their fruit and with his hatchet cut down branches for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly he felt a sharp pain in his head his limbs began to ache and sweat stood out on his body. Slowly he walked back to Savitri. She seeing his illness ran towards him and made him lie down and took his head in her lap but the prince was soon unconscious. Savitri, who knew that the hour of danger was at hand looked anxiously about her. Soon she saw near her a giant of monstrous aspect. His face was black and yellow. His eyes were bloodshot. His clothes were red in his hand was a mighty noose and he wore a huge gold and jewelled crown that flashed back the rays of the sun. Savitri guessed that he was Death come to claim her husband. She moved the prince's head from her lap to the ground and rising to her full height, faced the giant. Joining her

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hands together, she said with a trembling voice .

“My lord, from your mighty form I know you to be a god Tell me who you are and what you desire ”

The giant answered “I am Yama, the god of death The prince’s hours have been numbered from his birth and I have come to bind him with the noose in my hand and drag him away ”

With these words he bound with his cord the helpless form of Satyavan and began to drag him away towards the south Savitri, stricken with grief, followed A few minutes later Yama turned round and saw that she was following. “Go back, Princess,” he said, “and return home, and there honour the dead prince with the last rites.”

Bravely the princess faced the god “The wise have said that for two people to walk but seven paces together is enough for the making of a friendship Thus I have become your friend Listen, therefore, to what I say It is my duty to follow my husband even though I go to my death, for true happiness lies in wedlock and, none in celibacy or widowhood ”

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Yama was touched by Savitri's words and replied Princess I too deem myself your friend. Ask me then for any boon you will excepting only the life of your husband and I will grant it to you "

"Lord Yama my father-in-law is blind The boon I ask of you is that you should give him back his sight

"Princess I grant you the boon King Dyumatsena will get back his sight."

Yet Savitri still followed Again Yama turned and saw her Princess " he said you are wearied with walking Turn homewards I beg of you for you will gain nothing by journeying farther "

Lord Yama " answered Savitri I feel no fatigue while I stay with my husband and where he goes there too I shall go Satyavan was a virtuous prince and the wise have said that but a single day spent with the virtuous is a great gain So I desire to spend what remains of my life in his company "

Yama was again touched by Savitri's speech

Princess " he replied your words are full of wisdom and they please me. Ask of me

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therefore, a second boon; and if it is not Satyavan's life I will grant it to you "

"Lord Yama, my father-in-law through his blindness lost his kingdom The second boon that I ask of you is this Restore to King Dyumatsena his kingdom "

"Princess, your boon is granted, and Dyumatsena will soon be ruling happily over the kingdom of the Salyas "

Still Savitri followed Yama He again asked why she did not turn back

"Lord Yama, even mortals show mercy to their enemies when they seek protection You are a god and you have declared yourself my friend, and you, too, should show mercy "

"Indeed I would gladly show mercy," said the god, "but I cannot grant Satyavan's life Ask me any other boon and I will grant it to you "

"As you will, Lord Yama The boon that I ask for is this My father King Aswapati has no son Grant that he may have a hundred sons "

"The boon is granted, and now again I bid you retrace your steps "

Savitri still followed Yama Once again he turned and pressed her to go homewards

"Lord Yama, you have shown me both kind-

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ness and mercy but you are the lord of justice and it is for you now to show me justice. I beg of you my husband Satyavan "

Princess the life of Satyavan I cannot give you Ask me any other boon and I will grant it."

Then " answered Savitri I ask you to let me bear to Prince Satyavan a hundred sons as strong brave and beautiful as he was "

This boon I grant but I can grant you no more so turn back and tire yourself no longer by vainly following a dead husband."

Savitri's wan face lit up with a smile of triumph Lord Yama, your boon cannot take effect unless you give me back Satyavan. You are a god and you will not break your promise So give me back Satyavan that I may bear him a hundred sons as strong brave and beautiful as he was "

Yama thought and thought, but he could see no escape from the snare in which the brave princess had taken him. At last he said So be it, Princess I set free your husband. You shall bear him a hundred splendid sons and I add to my boons yet another You shall both live for four hundred years "

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The god of death loosed his captive and returned to his kingdom far away in the south. Savitri sat down by her husband's body and once more put his head on her lap. Suddenly he awoke and looked round, not knowing where he was. At last he said . "Savitri, I have slept long. Why did you not wake me? Where is the monster that was dragging me away?"

"He has gone, but we must hasten homewards, for night has fallen. To-morrow I will tell you everything that happened while you slept."

As her husband was still weak from his long trance, Savitri took his hatchet in her right hand and supported him with her left. Thus helping him, she led him home. When the prince and princess reached their hermitage, they found that King Dyumatsena had got back his sight, but that in his anxiety at their absence he had felt no joy at his recovery. The Brahmans asked them reproachfully why they were so late. The prince could tell them nothing, so the Brahmans turned to Savitri.

The princess explained . "Venerable sages, the wise Narada foretold that my lord would die to-day. That was why I would not leave him. In the forest he fell asleep, and as he slept

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Yama came and began to drag him to his own kingdom in the south but I spoke him fair and so pleased him. He therefore gave me five boons. He promised that King Dyumatsena should recover his sight and regain his kingdom that my father King Aswapati should beget a hundred sons that I should bear Satyavan a hundred sons and he promised that Satyavan and I should live four hundred years."

After Savitri had ended her tale, they all rose and went to their huts where they slept till the sun rose. A few hours later a great crowd came to the hermitage. When asked their business they said "We are men from the Salya country. The king's enemy has been killed by his minister and with him have perished also his son his kinsmen and his followers. Therefore King Dyumatsena, come back and reign over us. Blind though you be we want you as our king."

"My people" said Dyumatsena, "I will gladly return to reign over you, but I am no longer blind. The gods have given me back my sight."

When the Salya men heard this they rejoiced greatly and that very day they took Dyumatsena, his queen Satyavan and Savitri from the forest

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to their chief city. The Brahmans replaced their king on the throne and installed Satyavan as his successor. Queen Malavi, wife of King Aswapati, bore him a hundred sons, and Savitri bore to Satyavan a hundred sons, strong, brave and beautiful as their father. In due course Satyavan and Savitri became king and queen of the Salya people and ruled over them until they were four hundred years old. Then they passed gently away and their subjects sorrowed for them for many a twelvemonth afterwards.

II

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Damayanti was the only daughter of King Bhīma of Vīdarbha. When she grew up a youth named Nala succeeded as king of the Nishadas. Both youth and maiden were beautiful to look on and although they never saw each other they were often told of each other's merits and beauty. One day as King Nala was wandering in his gardens he saw there a flock of wild swans whose wings were of pure gold. He rushed forward and skilfully caught one. It struggled vainly then it said with a human voice "Let me go O king and I will so sing your praises to Princess Damayanti that she will never care for anyone but you." Nala immediately loosed the swan. It overtook its companions and led them to Damayanti's close, where it let itself be caught by the princess. It at once began to praise the looks and high qualities of Nala, king of the Nishadas. As you are the loveliest of living maidens" it said, so he is the most beautiful of

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living youths ” “O swan,” cried the princess, “I will let you go, if you will but praise me to Nala as you have praised him to me ” The swan promised and, when released, flew back to Nala’s garden, and there praised Damayanti to Nala, just as it had praised the young king to the princess

The swan’s praises caused Damayanti to fall deeply in love with Nala, and she grew so ill with longing that her father noticed it He resolved to hold a Swayamvara or tourney at which the bravest youths of India should strive to win her hand Unhappily Damayanti’s loveliness also attracted the notice of the gods, and Indra, Agni, Varuna and Yama all resolved to enter the lists On the way to Vidarbha they met Nala and, struck by his beauty, they begged him to become their messenger to Damayanti Nala was too chivalrous to refuse and gave his word to tell Damayanti that all four gods were in love with her The god Indra placed Nala unseen in Damayanti’s chamber, where he became visible He told her that the four gods loved her and that she was to choose one of them as her lord He added “I am Nala, king of the Nishadas ” Damayanti shook her head sadly and told Nala

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that she loved him and could not wed another Nala asked her how he the messenger of the gods could take her for himself Damayanti replied gaily

Let them come to the Swayamvara and you come also I shall choose you as my husband for the choice rests with the maid herself and you will be free from blame "

Nala went back and told the gods Damayanti's reply They were very angry at the slight, and on the day of the tourney all four gods took the exact form of Nala thus the princess at first could not distinguish between them and her mortal lover Then she noticed that the feet of four of them did not rest on the ground, but that the fifth stood on it and that the dust had settled on his clothes and limbs This one she knew to be Nala and by flinging her garland over his head and round his neck she chose him as her husband.

The four gods harboured no ill-will against the royal pair but on the way back they met the god Kali who also was a suitor for Damayanti's hand The four gods told Kali that he was too late and that she was already the bride of Nala Kali was very angry and

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vowed that he would in revenge drive Nala both from his kingdom and his queen For twelve years Kali brooded over his slight In the thirteenth year Nala gave him his chance Hearing grave news of state, he hastened to consult his ministers , and in his haste he forgot, before doing homage to the immortals, to wash his feet While he was thus impure he went into the presence of the pure Instantly Kali entered his body and possessed him

II

The evil god Kali was now complete master of Nala's body and could make it do whatever he, the god, willed He made Nala gamble at dice with his younger brother Pushkara and at the same time play so badly that he lost everything he possessed, save only his queen. Her he refused to stake, for she had preferred him to the immortals Clad only in a single piece of cloth, he walked out of his city Damayanti similarly dressed, did the same They spent that night, sad and wretched in a wayside inn While Damayanti slept, Kali drove Nala out of the inn to wander alone in the forest When Damayanti woke, she was at first overcome with grief at

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Nala's desertion. Then, pitying her husband in his distracted state she followed him into the forest. There a huge serpent seized her and would have devoured her had not a hunter heard her cries and killed the monster with a single sword-stroke. Damayanti was not yet safe, for the hunter tried to drag her captive to his hut. She prayed to the gods and they sent down a flame that burnt the wrong-doer to a heap of ashes. Freed from her peril she went on wandering through the woods. She passed a ravening tiger but when she asked it if it had seen Nala, it turned aside startled at her voice and courage.

Turning north she came to an anchorite's hermitage. He welcomed her and she told him her life-story. He passed into a trance and then foretold that she would find her husband and be loved by him again. Then the hermitage vanished and once more she continued her quest. At last she came to a wide river near which a company of merchants had camped. She hastened to join them but seeing her so worn and tired and clad only in a single rag they thought her an evil spirit. Their leader however spoke kindly to her and let her journey

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with them. For some days all went well, but one night when they were camped by a lake a herd of elephants came to drink. Seeing the merchants' tents, they rushed at them and killed a number of the company. The survivors, more than ever convinced that Damayanti was an evil spirit, drove her from their midst.

Damayanti fled from them until she met some Brahmans, who were on their way to the city of Swahu, king of the Chedis. They led her to the city, but as she walked through the streets, the children seeing the single rag round her, thought her mad and ran after her, mocking her. Nevertheless Damayanti walked on until she reached the royal palace. There she asked an aged nurse standing by the gate to take her to the queen-mother. The nurse asked her who she was.

'I am a serving-maid,' she said, "although of high caste. I had a devoted husband, but he lost all that he had at dice. Then he left me and fled into the woods like a mad man, and ever since I have been trying to find him." The nurse repeated her tale to the queen-mother, who took pity on Damayanti. She appointed her to be companion to her son's wife Sunanda. The

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young queen took a great fancy to Damayanti and led her joyfully into her own chamber

III

Nala after forsaking his queen had wandered at random through the forest. Suddenly he saw a great fire, in the midst of which lay a huge snake. It called to him, "Come hither come hither!" The king obeyed and the snake told him that it had once been Karkotaka, king of the snake people. It had been cursed by the sage Narada and was doomed to lie motionless until taken away by Nala. The king stooped down and lifted the snake which had shrunk so that he could lift it easily. When they were both safe from the flames the snake told Nala to put it down and walk away. When he had walked ten steps the snake bit Nala in the heel. It then soothed the king's anger by telling him that he was possessed by Kali. Its poison would so torment the god that he would be forced to leave Nala's body. "Till then" continued the snake "go to Ayodhya, the city of King Rituparna, and teach him your skill in training horses and driving chariots and learn from him the whole art of dicing for he is the most skilled dicer in

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all India." Nala did what the snake told him and went to Ayodhya. There he offered his services to King Rituparna as a charioteer, calling himself Vahuka. The king engaged him and was greatly pleased at his skill.

News of Nala's ruin and flight had reached Damayanti's father, King Bhīma of Vīdarbha, and he sent in all directions the most learned Brahmans in Vīdarbha, promising them a handsome reward if they found his daughter Damayanti and her husband Nala. One of the Brahmans, Sudeva, made his way to the palace of Sunanda, queen of the Chedis. Through one of the windows he saw Damayanti by the queen's side. She looked tired and worn, but Sudeva knew her at once. He entered the palace gates, the guards letting him pass as a Brahman. Drawing near to Damayanti he whispered in her ear. "Your father and mother and your children are well, and the king has sent me and other Brahmans to find you." Damayanti asked eagerly for news of her family. On hearing all about them she was overcome with grief, and burst into tears. The queen asked her in surprise what ailed her. Damayanti had perforce to confess who she was, and begged leave to go back to her home. Queen

Sunanda sadly gave her leave and sent her in a chariot with a strong escort to Vidarbha, where her parents and her children greeted her joyfully. As he had promised King Bhīma bestowed on Sudeva a splendid reward.

Glad although Damayantī was to see again her home and children her heart yearned for her husband Nala. She told her mother who told King Bhīma. He again sent Brahmans to search for Nala. As they were about to start Damayantī sent for them and said

Holy Sirs repeat these words to every likely man whom you meet. O king O gambler O beloved I your devoted wife whom you forsook asleep in the forest still loves you and still awaits you. If anyone answers tell me of him but do not let him know that I sent you."

The Brahmans left, and after some time one Parnada came back and told Damayantī that he had been to Ayodhya. He had had an audience with King Rituparna and in his presence and that of his court he had repeated Damayantī's message. None had seemed to understand but after the audience a charioteer named Vahuka had said to him in a broken voice. Good sir a wife even though forsaken by her husband

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should forgive him, especially if his mind is clouded by calamity." On hearing these words Parnada had returned with all speed to Vidarbha.

Damayanti guessed that Vahuka must be her beloved Nala. She went to her mother, the queen, and asked her to send Sudeva, the first Brahman messenger, to Ayodhya to see if Nala was really there. The queen sent for Sudeva, and Damayanti said to him :

"Go swiftly to Ayodhya and invite King Rituparna to hasten to Vidarbha. Tell him that King Bhima's daughter Damayanti will once again hold a Swayamvara, for her husband Nala has vanished and no one knows whether he is alive or dead."

Sudeva went with all speed to Ayodhya and gave Damayanti's message to Rituparna. The king was delighted and ordered Vahuka to harness his fastest horses that he might go without delay to Vidarbha. Nala grew sad when he heard the order, for he feared that he would now lose Damayanti for ever. Still the thought of seeing his queen once again cheered him and he offered to drive Rituparna to Vidarbha in a single day. To convince the king, Nala took

him for a drive behind some Sindî horses Rituparna was so pleased at his skill and the speed of the horses that he offered to teach Nala the art of dicing at which Rituparna was very skilled in exchange for Nala's knowledge of horsemanship Nala agreed and learnt all that Rituparna could teach him of dicing while he strove to teach the king all that he himself knew of managing horses.

Now all the time that Nala had been at Ayodhya the snake king's poison had been tormenting Kalî and at last the evil god could bear it no longer. He left Nala's body and stood humbly before him. Freed from possession by Kalî Nala knew the cause of his ruin and turned on the god to curse him but Kalî fled and hid himself in a Vibhîtika tree. Not seeing him Nala mounted Rituparna's chariot and began to drive the king to Vidarbha. Once the chariot was out of sight Kalî came out of the tree and slunk in shame to his own kingdom. The tree that had sheltered him withered away and fell to the ground.

IV

King Nala drove the Sindî steeds of Rituparna at full speed along the road to Vidarbha reaching it the same evening. As the chariot thundered

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through the city gates, Damayanti felt sure that the furious charioteer could be none other than her husband. As Rituparna entered Vidarbha, he looked in vain for any sign of the Swayamvara to which he had been invited, and when he visited Bhīma, the king asked him politely why he had come. Rituparna was so puzzled that he explained that he had merely come to do him homage. In the meanwhile Damayanti, looking from her window, saw Vahuka; but grief and care and his charioteer's dress had so changed him that she could not be quite sure. She sent a serving-maid, Keshini, to find out for certain who Vahuka was. Keshini went up to Vahuka and after asking him one or two formal questions, enquired "Have you as charioteer of King Rituparna learnt where Queen Damayanti's husband Nala has fled?"

"No," said Nala, sadly, "I have not. Nala alone knows where he is hiding."

Then Keshini lowered her voice and whispered the words that the Brahman Parnada had said in the audience chamber of King Rituparna.

"O king, O gambler, O beloved, your devoted wife, whom you forsook asleep in the forest, still loves you and still awaits you."

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King Nala whispered back "A wife even though forsaken by her husband should forgive him especially if his mind is clouded by calamity" When he had spoken thus he burst into tears and Keshini hastened back to tell her mistress

Still Damayanti doubted and bade Keshini watch Vahuka closely At last she said to Keshini "Take my son Indrasena and his sister to Vahuka and see if he recognises them. The serving-maid did so and King Nala on seeing them wept once more "Good serving-maid" he explained "the prince and princess resemble my own children so closely that I could not keep from weeping" Keshini ran back and told her mistress

Damayanti could no longer doubt and with her parents consent she sent for Vahuka. When the charioteer entered Damayanti said reproachfully "O Vahuka what do you think of a man who could forsake his wife in the forest, when she had done him no evil but had borne him children? Yet that was what King Nala did he who had held my hand before the fire and in the presence of the immortals Tell me Vahuka, what you think of King Nala's conduct?"

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King Nala's eyes filled with tears of sorrow and shame "My queen," he said, "I am guiltless. It was not I but the evil god Kali who was to blame. He took possession of me, and while he did so I was his slave. He caused me to lose my kingdom and to forsake you in the woods. Then Karkotaka, the snake king, bit him and with his poison drove him out of my body. But you, my queen, what have you done? You have announced that you will hold a second Swayamvara and wed a second husband. That is why I have driven King Rituparna here to Vidarbha."

Damayanti grew frightened, for Nala's brows were knit and his voice angry. "My king, my husband," she said, "how could you really think that I would wed a second husband, when I had preferred you to an immortal, and while you still lived? It was but a trick to bring you to Vidarbha, for the Brahman Parnada had told me you were serving King Rituparna. Be not angry with me, for touching your feet I swear that never even in thought have I been anything but true to you."

Still Nala's face grew no softer. Then Damayanti cried aloud

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O all-seeing wind that surrounds the earth
take away my life if I have sinned against my
lord ! O sun that daily crosses the sky take
away my life if I have sinned against my lord !
O moon that enters the heart of all living things
take away my life if I have sinned against my
lord !

From the heavens the wind god answered

King Nala, Damayanti speaks but the truth.
She has done you no wrong When she gave
out at King Rituparna's court that she would
hold a Swayamvara, it was only because she
wished to see you again Do not doubt her but
be united with her once more " As the wind
god spoke the other gods showered down flowers
upon the pair

Now when Karkotaka, the snake king was
leaving Nala, he had given him two pieces of
cloth and said When you wish to look like
your former self put on these pieces of cloth
and let your thoughts rest on me." Nala now
remembered the snake king's words and put on
the two pieces of cloth and thought of Karko-
taka. Instantly Damayanti saw before her the
beautiful youth who had won her at the
Swayamvara many years before. She burst into

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tears. Her husband embraced her tenderly, and she embraced his son Indrasena and his sister.

That day Nala and Damayanti spent in telling each other all that had happened since their separation. Next day Nala paid his homage to King Bhīma. The citizens of Vidarbha were overjoyed, but King Rituparna was more perplexed than ever. No Swayamvara was to be held, and his charioteer had proved to be King Nala! Shortly afterwards King Rituparna took his leave of King Bhīma and appointing another charioteer in Vahuka's place, he drove with his guards back to his city of Ayodhya.

Since King Nala had learnt from Rituparna the whole art of dicing, he longed to win back from his brother Pushkara all that he had lost to him. Going to his own kingdom of the Nishadas, he challenged Pushkara to another dicing match. Pushkara asked what the stakes were to be.

"Let your stake," said King Nala, "be your kingdom and your life. My stake shall be my newly acquired wealth and my queen Damayanti. If you care not for such high stakes, let us fight each other with bows and arrows in the open plain outside the city."

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Pushkara, certain of winning agreed but Nala by means of the knowledge learnt from Rituparna soon defeated Pushkara, who in a few moments forfeited both his kingdom and his life. But King Nala bore Pushkara no enmity for he knew that it was not his brother but Kali who had worked his ruin. This he told Pushkara adding

It was not you but Kali who was to blame. I shall not punish you for another's fault. You are a free man and I shall give you as before a younger brother's portion. Pushkara was deeply touched at his brother's generosity. "O king," he said, "you have restored me both to life and honour. May your fame be immortal and may you live ten thousand years!"

Now that Nala was again king of the Nishadas he sent for Damayanti and her father King Bhima. They came with a large retinue and the Nishada people gave them a right royal welcome. King Nala, grown wiser through adversity, ruled over his kingdom with such wisdom and justice that when at the close of a long life he died he was regarded by all as the greatest among the Aryan princes.

III

THE QUEEN OF THE ANARDES

Once upon a time there was a great king of Gujarat, who died leaving two sons, Phulsinh and Rupsinh. On the father's death Phulsinh mounted the throne. In no long time he too died, leaving a widow and no children, and Rupsinh became king of Gujarat, although still a little boy. Phulsinh's widow would have burnt herself on her husband's pyre had not the people called upon her to live and care for their child king.

The widowed queen was very wise and clever. So deft was she with her fingers that she could dress her hair with oil and afterwards press the hair so skilfully that not a drop of oil remained in it. One day, when Rupsinh was a lad of fifteen, he was lying asleep with his head resting on the lap of the queen. As he slept, she dressed his hair with oil and then began to squeeze it out. By chance she pulled out one of Rupsinh's hairs. Rupsinh awoke and said

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crossly You are not so clever to-day as usual with your fingers or you would not have pulled out my hair " The queen said with a laugh

Yes I am getting old and make mistakes. If you want someone who will never make mistakes you had better marry the queen of the Anardes " The queen was only joking for the Anardes were a race of fairies But Rupsinh took her words in earnest and cried Marry the queen of the Anardes then I will ! And till I have done so I shall neither eat nor drink inside my kingdom."

The poor queen bitterly regretted her words and begged the young king to pay no heed to them. But the headstrong boy would not mind her He told his grooms to saddle his horses

Tell me " he said to the queen how I am to find the home of the queen of the Anardes If not, I shall seek her without your aid. I shall ask my way and with God's help I shall find it." The widowed queen was greatly grieved at the manner in which the boy king had taken her words still she thought it best now to help him on his way rather than to thwart him.

She said If you will go my king then heed my words carefully for the road is long and

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full of perils. Trust none whom you meet or you will perish miserably. On leaving the palace gates ride to the north. In three days' time you will come to a dense forest. Ride boldly into it, and in its very heart you will find a lake. But beware of the lake and do not bathe in it or drink its waters. If you do, you will die ; for the lake is a fairies' lake and no mortal who bathes in it or drinks its waters can live. Ride, therefore, past the lake until you come to a great mountain. Avoid the mountain ; for near it lives a monstrous elephant, and should it see you, it will trample you to death. Beyond the mountain you will come to Thugtown, a town full of thugs and cheats. They will kill you if they can. If you can outwit the men of Thugtown, you will come next to a beautiful wood. Here above all be on your guard, for the wood is peopled by demons who live on human flesh. Beyond the demons' wood lie the lands of the Princess Phulpancha. She is so called because her weight is only that of five flowers. In her country you will surely die , but if someone will drop on your body three drops of Amrita, or ambrosia, from the bottle that I give you, you will come back to life. Such are the perils

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that await you yet if you still wish to go take with you my blessing "

As the widowed queen spoke her voice trembled and the tears rolled down her cheeks, for she loved Rupsinh as if he had been her own son She put in the youth's hands a bottle of Amrita. He took it, bowed his head to her feet, mounted his horse, and spurring it along the northern road was soon out of sight.

Three days later Rupsinh saw as he rode, the forest of which the widowed queen had spoken He rode into it and rejoiced in the shade of the great trees overhead. Suddenly he saw in front of him, like a sheet of silver a beautiful lake. Forgetting what the widowed queen had said he let his horse walk to the edge and quench its thirst A moment later he heard a noise of wings above him. He looked up and saw a great company of fairies on horseback flying towards the lake. The young king in a fright turned his horse's head towards the road and tried to spur it into a gallop But the poison of the fairy lake was killing the poor horse, and after trying feebly to answer to the spur it fell down dead. The king undid the girths and taking with him the saddle ran to a

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big tree close by and climbed into its branches. The fairies had not seen him, so they dismounted, tied their horses to trees, and plunged gaily into the fairy lake. Rupsinh slipped down from his tree, crept noiselessly to where the queen of the fairies had tethered her horse, and put his saddle on its back. He jumped on it and galloped off.

The fairies did not notice their loss until they came out of the water. The queen was in great distress, and she and other fairies followed Rupsinh's tracks until they came near the elephant mountain. Far off they saw Rupsinh galloping away on the fairy queen's horse. They called to the elephant to stop him, as he was a horse thief. The elephant ran after the king and caught him and his horse in its mighty trunk. Carrying them to the mountain, it tried to crush them to death against one of its steep sides. The young king was in despair. Then, regaining courage, he slashed so fiercely at the elephant's trunk with his sword that it let him and the horse go.

Rupsinh galloped away until he reached Thugtown. At its gate he saw an old man sitting. As the king rode up, the old man rose and

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with great courtesy said "Welcome, Thakor Your father married you when a child to my daughter and yet you have never come to see her until now " This is Thugtown " thought the king and the old man must be one of the thugs who live there " Still he could not but return the old man's greeting He said, My father died so long ago that I cannot remember him at all, nor anything he did. It was only the other day that I heard from a kinsman that my father had married me to your daughter I at once set out to claim my bride."

The old man bade the king enter the town and stay at his house so that he might meet his daughter They entered the town gates together At the old man's door his four young sons came out and greeted the king as their brother-in-law At night they would have led him to a room at the top of the house but the king guessed that in the night they meant to throw him from the window He said he could not sleep anywhere but on the ground floor He was so obstinate that the old man at last put a bed for him in the verandah on the ground floor while he and his sons slept in rooms off it

The king kept awake all night. It was well

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he did so. The queen of the fairies, who had never ceased to follow her horse's tracks, came to the old man's house and saw Rupsinh lying in the verandah. She tied a magic thread round his ankle and ran to the stable to mount the horse which the king had stolen. But Rupsinh untied the thread and tied it round the ankle of the old man. He had no sooner done so than the magic thread became quite taut. The fairy queen had mounted her horse and riding off dragged the old man after her. She never thought of looking back, but galloped straight off to the elephant mountain. There she threw him before the elephant, who at once trampled the old man to death. In the meantime Rupsinh drew his sword, and going to the four sons, he sternly demanded his horse. One of the four sons went to the stable to saddle it. As it was not there, Rupsinh made him give him one of the old man's own horses instead. He then rode as fast as he could out of Thugtoun.

Rupsinh rode north for some hours until he saw in front of him a beautiful wood. He at once recalled the widowed queen's warning about the demons who lived in it. He entered it, and suddenly he saw two demons fighting together.

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When they saw the king they stopped fighting and began to laugh. Rupsinh laughed back and then asked them what amused them. "We have not tasted human flesh," said one of the demons, "for twelve years. When we saw you we laughed for joy. But why did you laugh?" "I am a messenger of the god Shiva," said Rupsinh.

The parchment on one of his drums is torn and he sent me out to get two demon-skins with which to repair it. The drum is so big that the skin of one demon would not be enough. So when I saw two demons in front of me I laughed for joy." With these words Rupsinh drew his sword and rode at the demons as if to skin them alive. In an agony of fear they begged him to take the skin of their blind uncle instead. "One demon's skin will not do" said the king sternly. "besides the skin of a blind demon would sound hollow." The demons in despair offered Rupsinh a large ransom, but he would not accept it. At last they offered him a flying machine known as a *pavanpadi*. "In it," they said, "you can fly all over the sky and whenever you see a demon on earth you can come down and skin him." The king took the *pavanpadi* and tied it to his horse's back and rode on until

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he crossed the borders of the Princess Phulpancha's country. Some time later he reached her town and lodged with an old woman who owned a garden outside the city.

The king had not been there many days before the princess came to hear of him. One day as he rode under her window her maid-servants whispered to her, "That is the young king, my Princess." Phulpancha fell in love with him on the spot. One day Rupsinh came back to his lodging, hungry and thirsty, and asked the old woman to cook him some food at once. The old woman said that she could not, as she was weaving garlands for the Princess Phulpancha. The king bade the old woman cook his dinner while he wove the garlands, which he did very skilfully. He then took off his diamond ring and hid it in one of them. When his dinner was ready, he ate it, and the old woman went to the palace with the garlands. As the Princess put them round her neck, her fingers touched the diamond ring. She knew that it must have been sent to her by Rupsinh, as he lodged with the old woman.

Some days later Rupsinh left his lodging and, dressed as a poor Rajput, went to the court of

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Phulpancha's father and asked for employment. The old king was pleased with Rupsinh's speech and bearing and made him chief of the guards round the Princess's palace, paying him three gold pieces a day. In this manner Rupsinh came to see the Princess almost daily and told her all about himself. This was not long before the ceremony of the weighing of the Princess Phulpancha. It was the custom of the land that once a year the Princess should be weighed on a pair of magic scales. If no man but the king had seen her during the previous year her weight would only be that of five flowers. But if a man had seen her her weight would be that of an ordinary girl of her age and height. At the appointed hour Phulpancha sat on one of the scales, while the weigher put five flowers on the other. Instead of the five flowers balancing the Princess, her scale clung obstinately to the ground and it was not until two maunds had been put in the other that the Princess began to move upwards.

The old king made enquiries and found out that Rupsinh had several times spoken to Phulpancha. Instantly he had Rupsinh hanged from the branch of a tree. Fortunately before

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entering the king's service, Rupsinh had told the old woman of the garden about the Amrita. Hearing of the poor young king's execution, she went at night and sprinkled three drops of Amrita over his body. Rupsinh came to life again, but the old woman, fearing the old king's anger, would not take him back. Rupsinh was at first at his wit's end. Then he remembered the demon's *pavanpavdi* and seating himself in it he rose in the air and flew northwards.

After some time the young king came to a big garden, in the midst of which was a palace seven storeys high. He entered the palace and ran upstairs until he reached the seventh storey. On the top stair was seated an aged anchorite, who said to him, "Welcome, Rupsinh!" The king was astonished that the anchorite should know his name and he asked how he knew it. "My inner knowledge, my son, tells me your name. I also know that your brother's widow anxiously awaits your return. I know, too, that you are fated to win the queen of the Anardes."

The king begged the anchorite to bless him. The anchorite did so and added, "To-morrow I shall go to bathe in a pool in the palace gardens. When I do so, watch carefully the pomegranate

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trees in the orchard You will see the pomegranates on them suddenly open and from each one will come out an Anarde They will play and dance together in the garden, and she to whom the others will pay deference is their queen. After a time they will go back to their hiding-places. Note carefully the fruit which the queen enters Then go down into the garden pick it and take it back with you. But do not look behind you as many others before you have done, or you will be turned into stone."

Next morning the ascetic went to bathe, and Rupsinh did as the ascetic had told him. He watched the pomegranate trees and soon from each fruit there dropped to the earth a tiny fairy One of them slightly bigger than the others was clearly their queen. They played and danced for a time Then they ran back to their hiding-places. The pomegranates closed and hid their fairy lodgers from view The king however had seen which pomegranate held the queen. He went into the garden plucked the fruit, and turned back to the palace. Voices all round him cried out, Strike him! Kill him!" but remembering the anchorite's words he never once looked round until he had reached the palace

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door. Then he turned and saw the anchorite trying to soothe the other Anardes, for it was their voices which the king had heard. "It was fated that one of you should wed a mortal. What was fated has happened. So cease from troubling the king and his bride and give them your blessing instead." When he had calmed the fairies, he went to the king and said, "My son, start at once homewards and tarry nowhere on the road. Show the pomegranate to no one until you reach your city."

The king mounted his horse without delay and started on his homeward journey. In no long time he saw an ascetic, who for seven hundred years had been doing penances in order to win the queen of the Anardes. The king saluted the anchorite, who asked him whether he had won his goal. The king foolishly shewed the anchorite the pomegranate and let him take it in his hand. The sage put it under his foot, and when Rupsinh asked for it back, sternly bade the prince begone. The king grew angry and threatened to take it back by force. The anchorite turned towards a big tree close by and consumed it with a single fiery breath. He then said to the youth with a mocking laugh, "When

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I can blast a tree with a single breath do you think that I fear you for all your valour? For seven hundred years I have sought to win the queen of the Anardes I will not give her up" But seeing how downcast Rupsinh looked, he gave him a wand and said This is a magic wand. Take it. It will beat anyone whom you hate or fear and in battle it will always give you victory "

The king took the wand, although he thought it a poor exchange for the queen of the Anardes and going sadly to his horse got ready to mount it. As he put his foot in the stirrup the wand spoke to him with a human voice "O King you do not know my name. It is Lala Lath. For seven hundred years I have faithfully served the anchorite and now he has given me away in exchange for a woman. If you bid me I will give my old master a sound beating" Rupsinh who was very bitter against the anchorite for robbing him of the queen of the Anardes was delighted and said Yes, give him a beating the sounder the better" The wand then flew from the king's hand and began mercilessly to belabour the old sage, until in his pain and fear he threw away the pomegranate and begged for mercy

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The king picked up the fruit and the wand, and resumed his journey. Several days later he reached his capital. There he took out of the pomegranate the queen of the Anardes, who had by this time become reconciled to marrying Rupsinh. After greeting his sister-in-law, the widowed queen, he began to make everything ready for his marriage to the fairy queen, and in due time their wedding was celebrated with the greatest pomp and splendour. Unhappily in the crowd that watched the wedding was a pretty sweeper girl, called Rukhi, who was deeply skilled in black magic. She fell in love with the young king's handsome face and was filled with jealous rage at the happy look on the face of the queen of the Anardes. She devised a cruel plot to kill her. She sought and obtained service in the palace, where the fairy queen showed her the greatest kindness. One day the king, weary with the chase, fell asleep. The fairy queen had to go to a neighbouring well, to fetch water for her bath. She did not like to leave the king alone, so she asked Rukhi to watch by him until she came back. Rukhi promised to do so, but a minute or so later she followed her mistress to the well and pushed her

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As he prayed, he heard the hen sparrow say to her mate "The king of this city is a fool," and thereupon she told the cock sparrow the whole tale of the queen of the Anardes. "This very night," continued the hen sparrow "the queen will come out of one of the plantain trees into which the bania girls legs have changed. She will worship the God Shiva, re-enter the plantain stem and never again be seen on earth." The king heard the story and resolved to stay there all night. He did so and at midnight he saw one of the plantain stems open. Out of it came the queen of the Anardes who began to pray to the God Shiva. Before she had ended her prayer the king caught her by the hand. "Who are you?" cried the queen "and why do you take my hand?" "I am your husband Rupsinh" replied the king penitently "I have been blind and cruel but I have been wickedly deceived. Only forgive me, and nothing shall ever part us."

The queen was unwilling to stay but Rupsinh held her firmly all night by the hand. Next morning the king's ministers and the widowed queen went in search of him. When they found him at the temple the king told his sister-in-law

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all that had happened and begged her forgiveness also. To test the story, she showed the pomegranate to the fairy queen and bade her hide herself inside it. The fairy queen did so. Rupsinh's sister-in-law called to her and she came out. The widowed queen had no longer any doubts. She buried the pomegranate in the earth and went back with the king into his city. There the king called together the towns-people and before them all repudiated the sweeper woman Rukhi. He then had her hanged on the very spot where the bania girl had been executed. After thus ridding himself of Rukhi, he sent for the Princess Phulpancha and married her as well as the queen of the Anardes. In their company and that of the widowed queen, the king lived happily for ever so many years afterwards. The Princess Phulpancha was not blessed with offspring, but the descendants of the queen of the Anardes still own rich lands in Gujarat to this day.

IV

MAINAL DEVI

In old days there used to be in Gujarat a mighty reservoir known as the Karansagar or Sea of Karan but in A.D 1814 there fell a very heavy monsoon. The river Rupen, across which King Karan had built a dam rose to unprecedented heights and the dam long neglected and eight hundred years old burst. The pent-up waters left the lake and poured in a mighty flood towards the Rann of Cutch. The name of Karansagar still survives but it is now nothing but a barren waste.

Who was King Karan? He was a real personage. He was a Rajput of the Solanki clan and he ruled Gujarat from A.D 1082 to 1094. He was the father of the famous Siddhraj but for the purposes of this story his chief importance is that he was the husband of Mainal Devi.

For a long time King Karan's wives had failed to bear him a son and it seemed as if he would never have a male heir. Yet a romantic event

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happened that was to grant him a son, destined to be the most famous king who ever ruled Gujarat. One day shortly after Karan's succession an orderly told him that a portrait-painter who had journeyed far and wide craved leave to see him. The king, who was a patron of the arts, admitted the painter, who said with a deep obeisance

"O King! Your fame has travelled into many countries, and many are the people who wish to see you. I, too, have long wished to do so."

The painter then unrolled the pictures that he had brought with him. In one of them the goddess Laxmi was dancing before a Raja but beautiful though Laxmi was, there stood a maiden in the background lovelier still. The king looked at the picture, and though he admired the portrait of Laxmi, he fell head over ears in love with that of the exquisite maiden in the background.

"Who is that lovely girl?" he asked with impatience. "Where does she live? Is she a Rajputni? If so, what is her name?"

The painter replied: "There is in the Deccan, O King, a city called Chandrapur of

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which the ruler is Jay Keshi. The maiden in the picture is his daughter the Princess Mainal Devi. She is in the bloom of youth, but although many high-born cavaliers have sought her hand she has favoured none. Her relatives have often urged upon her that her youth will not last for ever and that she ought to take a husband. She has therefore devoted herself to the worship of the Goddess Gauri¹ and has kept praying to her to bestow on her a worthy bridegroom. One day a painter who had been to Chandrapur showed her a picture that he had made of you O King. She at once told her mother that you and you only should be her bridegroom. When she sees birds flying from the north she bids them tell her whether they have come from King Karan. She refuses to eat or drink and she is pining away for love of you. Indeed it was she who told me secretly to visit you at the same time Jay Keshi knows about my mission."

When he had finished speaking the painter presented as a guest-offering a large store of gold jewels, and other precious gifts that Jay Keshi had entrusted to him. The words of the painter his rich presents and the picture of the beautiful

1. Another name for the goddess Parvati Shiva's queen.

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princess fired the heart of King Karan, and he felt an uncontrollable desire to make her his wife. He sent by the painter a formal proposal of marriage, offering to make Mainal Devi his chief queen. The proposal was at once accepted, and Mainal Devi set off with a great escort to Anhilwada, King Karan's capital. The king saw with rapture the train of his betrothed princess, and marrying her with great pomp and ceremony made her the first of his queens, but when at the customary time he drew aside her veil, he was bitterly disappointed. Instead of the beautiful child whom the artist had depicted on his canvas, the new queen was just a harsh-featured girl. In a fury of rage the king refused to live with her as his wife. Mainal Devi, broken-hearted at her lord's neglect, vowed that she would burn herself alive and call down on King Karan and his subjects a *sati's* curse. Her mother, Queen Udayamati, who had accompanied her daughter from Chandrapur, vowed that she would do the same.

King Karan's subjects were terrified at the threatened curses of the two women and implored the King to change his attitude towards Mainal Devi. "The kingdom lacks an heir," they said,

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What matter if the maid is not beautiful if she can give King Karan a baby prince?" The king however stubbornly refused even to see his queen again and it seemed as if she and her mother would carry out their threats. Fortunately for the obstinate king and his subjects, his chief minister Manjal averted disaster by playing a trick on his master.

It so happened that King Karan had fallen in love with a dancer called Namunjala and had persuaded her to meet him in secret. Manjal heard of this and induced Namunjala to keep away and let Mainal Devi take her place. In the dark King Karan did not notice the deception and Mainal Devi was skilful enough to keep it up. At the same time she slipped the signet ring off the king's finger. Sometime later she showed the ring to Karan and told him that he was the father of her expected child. The rage of the king exceeded all bounds. He denied that he had ever been near Mainal Devi and when she asked him how otherwise she could have got the ring he went to his court Brahmans and declared that he would kill himself by heating a hollow brazen image and shutting himself inside it.

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Poor Mainal Devi was thus no happier than before. She loved her husband as the father of her child, so she went to Manjal and begged him to confess to the king what had really happened. Manjal agreed and, imploring Karan's pardon, told him how he had tricked him in his own and his people's interest. Karan, amused at the minister's cunning, forgave him without much delay, and he became completely reconciled to the queen when at Palanpur she presented him with a splendid young prince, afterwards the renowned Siddhraj, the most powerful monarch who ever ruled over Gujarat.

Raja Karan did not long survive the birth of Siddhraj, and the kingdom was then torn by the faction-fights which usually broke out when a king was not old enough to rule for himself. The chief struggle was between Dev Prasad, Karan's nephew, and Udayamati's brother, Madan Pal. Dev Prasad suffered an irretrievable defeat and burnt himself alive that he might join the dead king in Indra's paradise. Madan Pal became regent, but ruled with such harshness and cruelty that he was overthrown and put to death by his own soldiers. Power then passed into the hands of Manjal and the virtuous queen-mother,

and on Manjal's death into her hands alone. Her regency is still remembered as a golden age in Gujarat, and two of her chief works the great tanks called Mainal Sar at Viramgam and Mainal or Mulav Talav at Dholka still exist.

The justice of her rule is displayed in a quaint story told of her at the time of the construction of the Mainal Talav. To the east of the tank that the queen wished to excavate stood a house owned and lived in by a woman of evil life and character. Rani Mainal offered her very handsome terms for it, but the capricious woman refused. When asked why she was so disagreeable she replied with a toss of her head that she was likely to win greater fame by refusing the queen's generous offer than by accepting it. Any other ruler would have compulsorily acquired the woman's house and possibly not paid her anything for it, as a punishment for her obstinacy. Mainal Devi however had herself suffered and had acquired a full understanding of human weakness. She forgave the courtesan and in making the excavations avoided her house although she thereby spoilt the symmetry of the design. The courtesan's name is forgotten but the queen's act is enshrined in the local proverb

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"Would you see justice, then visit the Mulav tank !"

Another generous act has preserved her name at Bhalod, where there is a ford across the Narmada or Narbada river. The ford was much used by the pilgrims, who visited the temple to Shiva or Someshwar on the far bank. The Anhilwada government had always levied a tax on these pilgrims. They resented paying this, as they were performing a religious duty. Some were too poor to pay it and had to return to their villages, their vow unfulfilled. The pilgrims petitioned Mainal Devi and she went to the spot and saw for herself what inconvenience the tax caused. The pilgrims' petitions were supported by the temple priests. They assured Mainal Devi that in a former life she had been a Brahman lady and that she had made a vow at the shrine of Someshwar. She was then very poor and when she reached the ford, she could not pay the tax and had to return home. In such sorrow was she that from that moment she refused all food and starved herself to death. It was now the queen's duty, said the priests, to prevent so terrible a thing from happening again. The petitions of the pilgrims and the tale of the

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priests no doubt coincided with the judgment she had formed on the spot. Although the pilgrim tax brought in a large revenue, she remitted it, and to ensure its perpetual abolition she made her son pour water into her hand and declare the gift to be a religious one and therefore irrevocable

As the years went by Mainal grew older and her son grew up and when he was sixteen years old she resigned to him the sceptre of Gujarat. To celebrate the great occasion she had herself weighed in gold which she afterwards distributed in charity. At the same time she presented a gold elephant to the temple of Someshwar. She died not long after Siddhraj's succession, but it is likely that the memory of her will always live wherever the tongue of Gujarat is spoken

V

JASMA THE ODAN

When the young Siddhraj was firmly seated on the throne of Gujarat, he began to follow his mother's example and dig tanks throughout his dominions. His first and greatest achievement was the Sahasralinga talav or lake of the thousand Shivaite temples near Anhilwada. Before he had begun its excavation a countryman from Malwa happened to come to Anhilwada. During his stay he did nothing but praise the beauty of Jasma the Odan. The young king, ardent in the pursuit of pleasure, sent at once a messenger to Malwa, inviting the beautiful Jasma to his palace.

The king never anticipated a refusal, for the Ods are a lowly race, whose chief occupation is digging out tanks or building up embankments. Jasma, however, was married and loved her husband. She had moreover a baby boy and did not wish to leave him, so she told the messenger that though she felt greatly honoured by the

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king's proposal she found herself unable to accept it.

Since Jasma lived in Malwa and therefore outside Siddhraj's jurisdiction he could not send a troop of horsemen to bring her to Anhilwada. He therefore resorted to another method. As labourers were badly needed on the Sahasralinga lake, he sent his sister's son Dudhmal a Chavada Rajput, to hire the Ods of Jasma's village at wages higher than had ever been offered before. At once the Ods enrolled themselves for the work and with them went Jasma, her husband and her little boy. Directly the Ods reached Anhilwada Siddhraj's overseers showed them where their work was but they bade Jasma go to the king's palace. She refused in words that have passed into a Gujarati proverb

Ranis sleep in palaces it is fitter for the Odan to lie upon the ground."

In no way discouraged by Jasma's refusal Siddhraj went to watch the Ods and the Odans at their work. The more he watched the more madly he fell in love with Jasma. He begged her not to work so hard lest she might injure herself. Let her caste-fellows work, while she looked after her child. She laughed at the idea

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of injuring herself, for she was beautifully built and was as strong as any Odan there. As for her baby boy, she said .

“I have hung him to the branch of a tamarind tree, and as I come and go, I swing his cradle ”

The king had to attend to his regal duties, so he left Jasma alone for the time , but when the Sahasralinga lake was nearly finished, he paid off the other Od workers, but withheld Jasma's wages, so as to force her to stay behind. Jasma defeated this unworthy trick by giving up her claim and leaving secretly with her husband. King Siddhraj was furious , with a body of cavalry he pursued and overtook the Ods and cut down a number of them. Jasma saw that she could not escape alive from the king's clutches. In order that she might not become his prey, she drove a dagger into her breast. As she lay dying, she cursed Siddhraj and prophesied that the Sahasralinga tank would never hold water and that the Odan women would never again attract men outside their own caste.

Siddhraj returned sadly to Anhilwada, and next morning rode to the Sahasralinga lake. Alas ! Instead of the brimming pool that he had

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left, he found it without a drop of water. The terrible curse of the dying Jasma had taken effect and it seemed as if all his efforts to provide his capital with abundant water had been wasted. In despair Siddhraj sent for his chief minister and both consulted the leading astrologers of the capital. They decided that the only remedy was a human sacrifice. Acting on this cruel counsel the king had a Dhed or outcaste, called Mayo seized and brought before him. When the wretched man was brought before Siddhraj and learnt that he would have to be beheaded to remove Jasma's curse, he bore himself bravely and asked in return that his fellow-outcastes should be treated thereafter with less contumely than before. They had been compelled to live at a great distance from the town to wear untwisted cotton round their heads and a stag's horn hanging from their waist, that others might know that they were Dheds and pass without touching them. Siddhraj accepted these conditions and ordered Mayo to be taken to the dry bed of the lake. The order was carried out and the Dhed, as he went sang at the top of his voice the praises of the god Vishnu. He was garlanded with flowers and

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kneeling down was beheaded. Next morning when the king rode to see how his lake fared, he found it filled to over-flowing. So pleased was he, that he kept his promise to the Dheds and allowed them to dress like ordinary peasants and live much nearer to the town.

The other part of Jasma's curse, however, proved more enduring. Ever since her death the Odans have never dared to add to their charms by applying collyrium to their eyes or oil to their hair, nor do they ever try to attract any men other than Ods, who are used to the appearance of their women. Yet if the Odans now seem ugly, they are in spite of their poverty as chaste as any women in India, and since chastity is a greater treasure than beauty, it must be held that Jasma did not die in vain.

VI

SHAKTI THE JHALIN

It must be admitted that the story of Shakti the Jhala princess exacts an amiable credulity from the reader nevertheless the tale is firmly believed by her descendants the princes of Dhrangadra, Wadhwan Limdi and Lakhtar Whether she performed all the deeds ascribed to her may possibly be doubted but unless she was a very remarkable woman they never would have been ascribed to her I have therefore included her in my list of India's heroines

In the days that shortly preceded the Musulman conquest of Gujarat Karan Weghela ruled at Anhilwada A certain King Vahiya ruled Cutch from Karantigadh and King Hamir ruled over Samaya The last two were bitter enemies and when Vahiya lay dying his spirit would not go free, he said until someone promised to steal one hundred and twenty-five horses from the stable of his enemy Hamir His eldest son Kesar readily promised to do this and

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Vahiyas died happy. Unfortunately when Kesar wanted to carry out his promise, he found very few of the Cutch nobles ready to follow him on such a daring enterprise. Then he remembered the proverb, "There is no strength like one's own strength and no water like rain water." He gathered a few friends and servants, raided Samaya, and brought back the hundred and twenty-five horses. Nor was he content with this success. With ever-growing forces he raided Hamir's lands again and again and brought back horses, camels and women to Karantigadh. This went on for ten years until Hamir sent a herald to Kesar and asked for terms. Kesar only said: "Come and fight!" King Hamir objected that he could not in so barren a land support an army. King Kesar replied. "If you will come to fight I will sow a thousand acres of wheat for your soldiers' subsistence." So King Hamir came, stormed Karantigadh, and killed every man, woman and child inside it.

Of all King Kesar's family only one member escaped, namely Harpal Makwano. On his mother's side he was first cousin to Karan Waghela, who then reigned over Gujarat. Harpal fled to his kinsman's capital, Anhilwada. As he

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neared it he heard that a maiden had fallen into a deep well. Round its mouth stood a gaping crowd of helpless villagers too terrified to do anything. Harpal at once jumped into the well and pulled the girl out. From her he learnt that she had been thrown into the well by a *bhut* or evil genie. This demon had once been the soul of Keshav the *diwan's* brother. The king had carried off the *diwan's* wife and in resisting the royal guards Keshav had perished and had become an evil genie that called itself Baburao.

Harpal Makwano's gallant conduct in rescuing the maiden from the well ensured him a cordial welcome from Karan Waghela and when Harpal offered to rid the land of the demon that had been Keshav the king at once took him into his service. On the last day of the month of Asho (the Indian All Hallows Eve) Harpal went to the burning-ground in order to fulfil his undertaking and exorcise by various occult rites the demon that was plaguing Gujarat. While he was engaged in these there came to him the Shakti an immortal attendant of the goddess Parwati. She had been searching all over the earth for a suitable human husband but had found none. She now fell in love with

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Harpal Makwano, but she refused to marry him unless he could stand the test that she would impose on him. She did not tell him what it would be, but when in the early morning Harpal Makwano was returning home from the burning-ground, he again met the Shakti. This time she was standing by the well whence he had rescued the girl. He asked her to give him water, but she did not answer. He asked again but got no reply. Then he plucked her skirt. The woman, according to the tale, grew as tall as the clouds and broad in proportion, and looking down at Harpal laughed at him. Such an experience might have terrified anyone, but Harpal and fear had never met. He rushed at the Shakti and struck her with his staff, and after a tremendous struggle the Shakti told the young hero that he had stood the test nobly. She would marry him, but on one condition only. If anyone but Harpal learnt her divine nature, she would leave him for ever. Whatever truth is contained in the story, the Shakti made Harpal an excellent wife. With her divine knowledge she told her husband that the only way to overcome the evil genie Baburao was to seize him by a lock of his hair.

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Harpal promptly did so and reduced the evil genie to the status of a servant of his household. King Karan was so delighted with his kinsman for ridding Gujarat of this pest that he begged him to name his reward. Prompted by the Shakti Harpal asked the king to give him as many villages as he could deck with garlands during a single night. This seemed quite a reasonable request, for the roads were bad and the villages far apart and accordingly the king at once made Harpal a written grant. Next morning he was horrified to learn that between 9 p.m. and 4 a.m. Harpal with the aid of the Shakti and the now submissive Baburao had decorated the town of Patdi and two thousand other villages. Karan's queen the beautiful Kauladevi induced Harpal to restore five hundred of the villages, but he retained no less than fifteen hundred.

One might have thought that Harpal Makwano could now have settled down as a country gentleman and enjoyed happiness with the Shakti but he had other difficulties to overcome. He had subdued Baburao the evil genie, and forced him to do his bidding but unfortunately the demon had attached a condition to his servitude. Harpal had always to give him

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fresh work to do. If none was forthcoming, he would turn on Harpal and devour him. The Shakti, however, proved too many for Baburao. She advised her husband to fix a high pole in the ground and tell Baburao to climb up and down it for all eternity. This disposed of one danger, but there were others to come

In 1297 Karan Waghela was driven from Gujarat by Ala-ud-din, Emperor of Delhi. Harpal Makwano thereupon left Anhilwada and fell back on his fief of Patdi. This was in Kathiawar, and owing to its remoteness Harpal and the Shakti managed to repulse the Afghans. Husband and wife lived at Patdi long enough for the birth of three sons and a daughter. Unhappily one day the children were playing in the street outside the main gates of the palace, when suddenly a mad elephant broke loose from its keeper and rushed down the street. Several Rajput soldiers struck at the monster and tried to turn it; but maddened by the sword-cuts, it seized and trampled them under foot. It seemed that nothing could save the children, who stood paralysed with fear, looking helplessly at the oncoming elephant. The servants rushed to the Shakti and told her. She put

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her arm through the window and as she did so her arm grew longer and longer until she was able to pull in the children one after the other. From that day they were known as Jhala Rajputs from the Gujarati word *Jhalavun* which means to seize. From them the eastern portion of Kathiawar is known as Jhalawad or the fenced land of the Jhalas.

Harpal naturally loved his wife more than ever as the saviour of his children. She was however soon to turn his joy to sorrow. The rescue of the children had not passed unnoticed and the villagers began to repeat the tale with abundant exaggeration. Harpal Makwano they said must have married a goddess and worse still they began to worship her. One day the Shakti said sadly to her husband:

"When I married you I made one condition namely that if any one but you learnt that I was more than human I should leave you. The villagers now have learnt it, and I can stay with you no longer." Harpal implored the Shakti to release herself from the vow she had made and the children joined him in his prayers but it is impossible to turn a divinity from her purpose. One dark night in Shrawan (July

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August) the Shakti disappeared and was never seen again; but her descendants rule eastern Kathiawar to this day.

VII

QUEEN KAULADEVI OF GUJARAT

In A.D 1297 the kingdom of Gujarat seemed the most prosperous in India. The dominion of its King Karan, a Waghela Rajput, included to the west the province of Kathiawar to the shores of the western ocean. To the east his rule extended far into Central India and to the south it ran beyond the frontiers of Khandesh. The harvest had been abundant. All rivals to the throne had been suppressed, and the king brave to the point of folly was admired and loved by his subjects and feared and envied by the princes and feudal lords throughout the kingdom. Yet signs were not wanting for the shrewd observer that the prosperity of his great dominion might well be fragile.

At Delhi there ruled the able and unscrupulous Ala-ud-din Khilji. Calling himself the second Alexander he was filled with the lust of conquest and sought every opportunity of extending his empire. Naturally the malcontents

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of other states turned to him for support, and he readily availed himself of every excuse for aggression. On the other hand, King Karan was only thirty years of age and incapable of self-restraint. One day while walking through the streets of Anhilwada, his capital, he saw Rupsundari, the beautiful wife of his first minister, Madhav, a Nagar Brahman. He fell in love with her, and in his minister's absence sent a body of troops to fetch her to his palace. They did so, but unhappily Madhav's brother Keshav was at home and in a scuffle with the king's soldiers was killed. His widow Gunsundari became a sati, and before she died she called down a terrific curse on the king, his country, and his subjects.

When Madhav returned home, he found his wife gone and his brother and sister-in-law dead. He at once fled from Gujarat and made his way to Delhi. An important service performed for one of the imperial princes secured him an interview with the emperor. He implored Ala-ud-din to avenge him, laid stress on the superiority of the imperial army, the great beauty of Kauladevi, and the ready prey that Gujarat offered, disgusted as its people were

with the high-handed rule of the king Ala-ud-din cared little for the sufferings of King Karan's subjects for he himself inflicted far worse cruelties than ever Karan had been guilty of but he was delighted at the excuse to seize a new country and in a few weeks Anhilwada was startled by the news that a large Afghan army under the Emperor's brother Alaf Khan, was advancing by forced marches on the capital.

The obvious course for Karan was to fall back on Anhilwada. Behind its walls he could have held out long enough for his vassal chiefs to call out their troops and cut the communications of the invading army. To Karan's impetuous mind this course seemed unworthy for he was not without good reason nicknamed Ghelo or the rash. He appealed to the Rajput nobles at court and they with ready loyalty expressed themselves eager to meet the Mussulman no matter what the odds anywhere their liege lord directed. He chose a strong position not far from the city gates. The first days fighting went in favour of the Rajputs. The Afghans then proposed a truce. Believing the word of the faithless Alaf Khan Karan called in his outposts and his sentries and he and

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his men went to sleep. Just before dawn, the Afghans rushed the position and cut the Rajput army to pieces. Karan, badly wounded, escaped from the field. Anhilwada, stripped of its garrison, was forced to open its gates, and the Afghans entered just in time to prevent Karan's ladies from burning themselves alive. Alaf Khan's express orders were to bring back to Delhi the beautiful Kauladevi; but that haughty lady had no wish to share the Emperor's favours with a hundred other beauties. Her father's principality was in Jhalawad in eastern Kathiawar. Dressing herself in a man's clothes, she escaped from Anhilwada, and mounting the best horse left in the royal stable, she rode at breakneck speed towards the home of her childhood. Unfortunately she fell on the way into the hands of a Bhil tribe. The chief learnt who she was and insisted that she should become his bride. To marry a foreign emperor was bad enough, but to be the mate of a wild savage was far worse, so she slipped away from the Bhil camp and rode back to Anhilwada, surrendering herself to Alaf Khan's troopers.

In the capital Alaf Khan received the captured fugitive with every courtesy and sent

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her with a splendid escort to Delhi. There Ala-ud-din married her and such were her wit her beauty and her charm that she soon acquired a commanding position in the imperial household. She became in fact Empress of India.

When Kauladevi had fled from Alaf Khan's zenana she had perforce left behind her two little daughters Kanakdevi and Devaldevi. She entrusted them to a servant and ordered him to take them by slow stages to Jhalawad and join her there. On the way the servant learnt of Kauladevi's capture. He also heard that King Karan wounded though he was had made his way to Baglan in Khandesh a fort belonging to the Maratha king Ramdev of Devgiri. The faithful servant turned south thinking that as the children had lost their mother it would be better to take them to their father than carry out the queen's orders. This he did. The Waghela king had been received with the utmost courtesy by Ramdev and had been given Baglan as his residence with a grant of crown lands to support his dignity.

The two little girls reached their father in safety but some years later the elder Kanakdevi died of fever caught in the wild monsoon

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storms that beat on Baglan Four years later, if we accept the story of the novelist Mr Nandashankar, Ramdev's son Shankardev saved in a tiger hunt the life of Devaldevi. Not unnaturally he wished to marry the princess, who had grown into a beautiful girl of fourteen Here, however, a difficulty arose. Devaldevi was a Rajputni by caste, whereas Shankar was a Maratha, and Karan, regardless of his dependence on Ramdev's bounty, haughtily refused the southern king's proposal that his son should marry the princess. Whatever the Maratha may have felt, he was too courteous to show his displeasure and he graciously continued to the Waghela his favour and protection.

A year or two afterwards an event happened that caused King Karan to reconsider his refusal of Ramdev's offer.

Amid the splendours of the imperial zenana Queen Kauladevi had ample leisure in which to think of former years in Gujarat It is not probable that she much regretted her former husband, King Karan, for if he had been monarch of Gujarat, Ala-ud-din was Emperor of India. Although to change from Hinduism to Islam must have been distasteful for a high-caste

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Hindu yet in common with Karan's other subjects she had suffered such a shock from the abduction of Rupsundari and the sati of Gunsundari that she had lost all interest in religion. What, however, preyed on her mind was the memory of her little daughters. She had heard of the death of Kanakdevi but with the Emperor's help she might still get back Devaldevi. Her natural affection was strengthened by her ambition. So long as Ala-ud-din lived she would retain her state but if he died, she would tumble headlong from her pinnacle of glory. If on the other hand she could marry her daughter to the Emperor's heir Khizr Khan she would still retain after her husband's death a large share of her power. She had but to suggest her wish to the Emperor and he at once approved it.

Two armies were detailed to achieve her purpose. One under Alaf Khan was to march southwards on Baglan from Anhilwada. A second army under an able eunuch called Malik Kafir was to advance on Devgiri from Delhi. Karan at once informed Ramdev that he was no longer unwilling to give his daughter's hand to Shankardev and asked for reinforcements. The

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Maratha king had none to spare because of Malik Kafir's approach, so he advised Karan to join him at Devgiri. Karan, however, did not abandon Baglan without a struggle. He held it successfully for two months and then slipped through the besieging lines with his garrison. Pursued by Alaf Khan, he detached a body of horse to escort Devaldevi to Devgiri by another road. Freed from the care of his daughter, he was able to shake off the Afghan pursuit, and in despair Alaf Khan ordered a two days' halt near Ellora. During the halt three hundred of his troopers went without leave from the camp to see the caves. As ill-luck would have it, they met as they were returning home the Rajput cavalry of Devaldevi. Although inferior in numbers, the Afghans at once attacked the princess's escort and dispersed it. As they fought over the women, whom their protectors had abandoned, they learnt that one was no other than the beautiful Devaldevi. Overjoyed, they took her to Alaf Khan, who, in the rapture of the find, overlooked their absence without leave and sent the princess to Delhi. There she achieved a triumph equal to that of Queen Kauladevi. The Emperor was delighted with

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her His eldest son, Khizr Khan fell madly in love with her and the marriage of the imperial prince and the Waghela princess was celebrated as soon as the ambitious Kauladevi could arrange it

It might be thought that, once the Empress had reached her goal she would have passed her declining years in complete happiness. As so often occurs in human affairs events turned out differently from what she had expected. In the company of his lovely bride Khizr Khan disregarded entirely the interests of the empire and paid less and less attention to his rapidly ageing father Ala-ud-din neglected by his son came to lean more and more upon the eunuch Malik Kafir who not long before had won a series of splendid successes in southern India and had returned to Delhi laden with the accumulated spoils of centuries.

Malik Kafir however was as vile a scoundrel as has ever disgraced human history Seeing the growing rift between father and son he plotted the extermination of the whole Khilji house. By forged papers he induced the Emperor to arrest for treason his two sons Khizr Khan and Shadi Khan as well as Kauladevi and Devaldevi.

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Having thus isolated the Emperor, Malik Kafir, with his own hands, secretly put some poison in the Emperor's food and killed him. The Emperor dead, Malik Kafir executed Kauladevi and Devaldevi and their attendants, and blinded Khizr Khan and Shadi Khan. A third son, Mubarak Khan, managed to enlist the sympathies of his guards, and surprising Malik Kafir, killed him and ascended the throne.

Such was the end of the beautiful Kauladevi. Resolute and ambitious, she might have achieved every human ambition, but for the ill-fortune that dogged her. Her first husband, Karan, was killed fighting in the Maratha ranks, when Mubarak Khan invaded the Deccan in person. The death of her second husband, Ala-ud-din, was, as we have seen, due indirectly to the success of her own intrigues. Yet, if Kauladevi did not establish a succession of kinswomen at the Afghan court, she showed the way to the ladies of Jodhpur, and they effectively did so in the days of the Moghul Emperors.

VIII

CHAND BIBI OF AHMADNAGAR

Chand Bibi was the daughter of Hussein Nizam Shah an unpopular king of Ahmadnagar who after murdering his father executed fifteen of his own relations during a reign of a few months. Chand Bibi's character was very different from her father's. Married in early youth to the able and vigorous Ali Adil Shah king of Bijapur this daughter wife, and sister of kings united in her person all the highest qualities of the Bijapur and Ahmadnagar houses.

The pen of an English novelist, Meadows Taylor has in his romance *A Noble Queen* described her thus

There is a portrait of the Queen still, I hope, in existence at Bijapur taken before her husband's death by some Persian artist at the Court. It is a profile exquisitely painted with none of the stiffness which usually accompanies Oriental pictures. The features are regular and very beautiful the eyes large of a soft brown

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with long dark eyelashes, the eyebrows arched. The mouth is very sweet and gentle in expression and bears a slight smile; but there is a decided tone of firmness about the full round chin and graceful throat; and the forehead, though not high, has a breadth and power which must have been very remarkable. Altogether the queen's is one of those faces which once seen, is never forgotten; and the complexion is fair, with a faint tinge of carnation through the cheeks, which makes it almost European. Could Titian but have painted the face, it would have been one of the most perfect and interesting in the world "

So long as her husband lived, Chand Bibi had little place in history, but it is more than probable that her advice was largely responsible for his military successes, of which the most notable was the overthrow of the southern empire of Vijayanagar, and she certainly helped him in the erection of his great public works, the Juma Mosque, the Hauz-i-Shahpur, the great reservoir that supplied the city with abundant water, and the superb stone rampart and moat that in later years were to save Bijapur from countless enemy attacks.

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In 1580 Ali Adil Shah died childless leaving as his heir a nephew Ibrahim Adil Shah only nine years old. Chand Bibi took care of the little boy's person and education. The direction of the state was entrusted to a certain Kamil Khan. The latter was an unworthy choice, for he soon aspired to usurp the throne and to win the affection of Chand Bibi. That great lady scornfully rejected his suit, and with the aid of another high officer of the kingdom Kishwar Khan drove him from the city. Kishwar Khan was an even worse selection than Kamil Khan. He assumed the entire government of Bijapur and when Chand Bibi complained he retaliated by expelling her with the utmost indignity from the royal zenana and confining her in the fortress of Satara, destined long afterwards to be the prison of the immortal Shivaji's descendants. Such tyranny defeated its own object. Chand Bibi was extremely popular with the Bijapur citizens and whenever Kishwar Khan drove through the streets he was followed by a howling mob. At the earliest opportunity he fled and the mob releasing their beloved queen brought her back in triumph to Bijapur and once more entrusted to her care the person of the young king.

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For four years she wielded the chief power in the state. Then, disgusted at the turbulence of the Bijapuri nobles, she returned to the home of her girlhood. In 1595, on the death of the king her nephew, it was proposed that she should be responsible for conducting the administration of Ahmadnagar. One of the leading nobles, frustrated in his ambitions, called on the Moghuls for help. Prince Murad, son of the Emperor Akbar, answered the call by invading Ahmadnagar territory with a northern army. On the appearance of the Moghul troops all Ahmadnagar called on Chand Bibi to defend them. The traitor fled, and Chand Bibi, declaring her great-nephew, Bahadur Nizam Shah, king, assumed the government in his name.

Order now appeared where all had been disorder. The heroic queen with veiled face, but clad in armour and sword in hand, appeared everywhere to direct and cheer the garrison. Prince Murad sought to mine the walls. Chand Bibi showed her troops how to countermine and with her own hands removed the powder from two of the mines. At last a third mine exploded and several yards of the fort wall crumbled and fell. Her chief officers fled in

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terror but Chand Bibi taking their place shamed her generals into resolution. From four in the afternoon till darkness Moghul storming parties tried to force their way through the wall, but fired by the spirit of the gallant lady the Ahmadnagar garrison were invincible. At last the breach was choked with the corpses of the assailants. Night fell. The besiegers withdrew to their camp and next morning they saw to their dismay a new wall which the unconquerable queen had built during the night. The gallantry of Chand Bibi was now the talk of all Prince Murad's camp and the chivalrous Moghul conferred on her the title of Sultana or Queen in her own right. He also offered to withdraw his troops in return for the cession of Berar. Chand Bibi as modest in success as she had been superb in peril formally ceded the province, and the northern army retired.

She had thus saved Ahmadnagar but the factious spirit of the nobles was beyond her cure. She appointed a trusted officer Mahomed Khan as her first minister. In a few months he sought to usurp the regency. The queen in despair wrote to her nephew Adil Shah of Bijapur for troops with

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which to reorganize the kingdom. Mahomed Khan in revenge begged the imperial general in Berar, Khan Khanan, to come to Ahmadnagar, promising that he should thereafter hold it as a fief of Delhi. Khan Khanan agreed. The Moghul horse neared the city. Then once again the mob rose, imprisoned the usurper, and restored the government to the dauntless lady. In answer to her appeal armies came from Bijapur and Golconda, and although Prince Murad defeated them on the Godavari, dissensions in his own camp robbed him of the fruits of victory. In the following year an Ahmadnagar army actually penetrated into Berar, but once more the quarrels of the nobles thwarted the wisdom of Chand Bibi. Ahang Khan, an Abyssinian soldier of fortune, tried to overthrow her rule. Faction-fights broke out all over the city, and the Emperor Akbar, grasping the opportunity, left Delhi and took the field in person. Ahang Khan sought to oppose the Moghuls but was defeated and fled, and now for the last time the great queen tried to save her country.

Besieged by the Emperor, she conducted the defence for some weeks with all her former

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daring At last she resolved to evacuate Ahmadnagar and to retreat southwards to Junnar with the young Bahadur Shah Had her plan been carried out the Ahmadnagar state might have lingered on for many years intact but a eunuch named Hamid Khan, who had turned against Chand Bibi because she had disregarded his advice, ran into the streets shouting to the garrison that the queen had betrayed them to the Moghuls. The credulous soldiers rushed into the palace and killed the noble woman whose only thought had been to serve their interests With the heroic queen died the spirit of her troops A few days later the Moghul army stormed the fort, put its defenders to the sword, and carried off Bahadur Nizam Shah to Gwalior Fort, wherein he died a captive. Although it is true that the whole state was not subdued until thirty seven years had passed, yet the fall of the Ahmadnagar fort may be deemed to mark the end of the Ahmadnagar kingdom.

So lived and died this great contemporary of the English queen Elizabeth Chand Bibi had no less political wisdom and discernment than her Tudor cousin and she excelled her in beauty in courage and in the art of leading and

inspiring armies. Perhaps the greatest tribute paid to her memory was the pathetic legend that for many years was treasured by the peasants of the Western Ghats. She had escaped, they said, through an underground passage from the doomed city and was hiding, like the fabled Barbarossa, in some magic cave in the Sahyadri mountains. When the time came, she would again reveal herself, drive the Moghuls across the Vindhya, and bring back once more the golden days of Ahmadnagar.

IX

NUR JAHAN

The grandfather of Nur Jahan was a Persian from Teheran and at one time he held high office in the Persian government. Unhappily his fortunes declined and one of his sons, impatient of the poverty at home, resolved to emigrate to India. He took with him his wife, their two sons and a daughter. By the time the family reached Kandahar the father's slender resources were exhausted and in the midst of this beggary his wife gave birth to a baby girl. She was given the name of Nur Jahan or "Light of the World". Her wretched parents had neither money to pay for a lodging nor for food. To continue their journey or to keep the child seemed alike impossible. They decided to expose their baby on the road by which the caravan with which they had come would pass next day.

With breaking hearts husband and wife took the little girl a mile or two out of Kandahar and

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left her on the road leading from the southern gate. Then they turned back towards the city. They had not gone more than a quarter of a mile when the mother's fortitude gave way and she persuaded her husband to turn back and rescue the little castaway. Back they went and found the baby fast asleep as they had left her. They picked her up and were returning to the city when they met the caravan. Its chief member, a rich merchant, saw them and asked them what they had been doing. When he heard their tragic tale, he took pity on them, and adopted the baby girl as his own child. He appointed the mother as nurse and gave food and clothes to all the family.

As the merchant talked to the father and his eldest son, he found that they were far more intelligent than the average person of their class, so he gave them employment as clerks. They justified his choice and he soon promoted them. Eventually he presented them to Akbar as candidates for the public service. The Emperor first tried them in minor and then in higher posts. As her father and brother prospered the little Nur Jahan grew up, and her beauty began to attract

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attention Her mother had received the honour of free access to the imperial zenana and as Nur Jahan reached girlhood, the mother took the daughter with her and presented her to the Emperors ladies In time Nur Jahan became her mothers constant attendant and in the zenana she happened to meet and attract the notice of Akbars son Prince Selim afterwards the Emperor Jahangir The prince fell in love with the little Persian maid and though the difference in their stations stood in the way of their marriage he tried to win her love.

The mother came to know of Prince Selims wooing and being anxious for her daughters welfare she mentioned her difficulty to one of the older princesses whom she was visiting The imperial lady put the facts before Akbar The Emperor naturally scoffed at the idea of his son marrying a little beggar-maid so he arranged that Nur Jahan should be removed from court and married to a fellow-countryman named Sher Afgan Khan who had recently joined the imperial service. In order to keep Sher Afgan Khan and his wife out of the sight of Selim, the Emperor made him a handsome grant of land in Bengal

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Fate, however, plays strange tricks, especially where lovers are concerned. After Akbar's death Prince Selim succeeded to the Moghul throne. It was a fitting succession, for he was not only Akbar's eldest, but his sole surviving son. He took the name of Jahangir, and it is as the Emperor Jahangir that he is known in history. Almost his first step was an attempt to recover his lost, but still beloved, lady. He appointed his foster-brother Kutb-ud-din as viceroy of Bengal with definite orders to bring Nur Jahan back to Delhi. It was not supposed that Sher Afgan Khan would offer any objections, but the young Persian was made of sterner stuff than the sneering critics who hung about the Moghul court. He met all overtures with a pointblank refusal, resigned from the Emperor's service, and left off wearing arms to show that he was no longer the Moghul's officer.

The viceroy did not lose hope of success. When touring the Bengal province, he camped near the residence of Sher Afgan Khan and invited the young Persian to visit him. To refuse the invitation would have been an open act of disloyalty, so Sher Afgan Khan waited on

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the viceroy but with a dagger concealed in his dress. Unaware of the danger Kutb-ud-din repeated the Emperors proposals as regards Nur Jahan but her Persian husband again indignantly refused them. The viceroy threatened him but as an answer to his threats Sher Afgan Khan drove his dagger into his oppressors heart. He was at once cut down by the guards and so died with his honour unstained.

A charge of treasonable conspiracy was trumped up against the dead man his property was seized, and Nur Jahan was conveyed to Delhi. The Emperor now his own master offered marriage to the beautiful widow. To her great credit she indignantly refused. She had loved Sher Afgan she cried and certainly would not be the wife of his murderer. On seeing Jahangir she backed her refusal with such gestures of disgust that he perforce resigned himself to his loss and contented himself with placing Nur Jahan among his mothers attendants.

Nur Jahan had been a loving and faithful wife, but she was also a resolute and ambitious woman. As time healed her wounds and the memory of her gallant husband grew dim she

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began to think that the duties of a not too well treated attendant in the zenana were a poor substitute for the glories of a throne that could be hers for the asking. After all, the dead were dead, and culpable though the Emperor's acts had been, they had been prompted by his love for her. When Jahangir next entered the zenana, he noticed that instead of giving him her usual sullen look, Nur Jahan smiled at him. Although he was surprised at this exchange in Nur Jahan's attitude towards him, her smile rekindled his love for her and he again asked her to share his throne. This time his offer was accepted

Nor did Nur Jahan rest content with being Jahangir's wife. She soon asserted her position and became in fact as well as in name the greatest lady in India. Her father became prime minister. High office rewarded her brother Asaf Khan, and the Emperor made no important decision without consulting his beautiful Empress. Nor was Jahangir's consort unworthy of her high responsibilities. Her father was a shrewd and upright prime minister. Her brother was not undeserving of his sister's patronage. She herself exercised on the Emperor

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the best of influences. She did not indeed turn him into a saint or even a wise man. there is a limit to the powers of any human being. Still she saw to it that in general he tempered his judgments with mercy.

In more feminine accomplishments Nur Jahan was supreme. She introduced taste into the Moghul court and reduced its wasteful extravagances. She refurnished the palace with an artists eye and beautified the fashions of her ladies dresses. With her mothers help she invented the famous scent still known as attar of roses and her skill in humorous and impromptu Persian verses was unrivalled in all Delhi.

Nur Jahan was raised to honours such as had never before been enjoyed by the consort of an Indian ruler and among other marks of sovereignty her name was put on the Moghul coinage along with the Emperors. At first she took a special interest in the Emperors second son Shah Jahan until her daughter by Sher Afgan Khan married Prince Shahriyar. Shah Jahans youngest brother. Nur Jahan then deserted the cause of her former favourite and exercised all her influence in favour of her son-

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in-law She probably saw in him a more pliant instrument to her will in case Jahangir died. After various efforts at reconciliation with his father, Shah Jahan rebelled, but was reduced to submission by the ablest Moghul general, Mohabat Khan. This victory gained for the successful soldier the favour of the Emperor and the bitter jealousy of the Empress. Having discomfited Shah Jahan, she now intrigued against his conqueror. Mohabat Khan, however, was a Kabuli Afghan and a dangerous man to treat unjustly.

Summoned to Jahangir's camp to answer for alleged embezzlements in Bengal, he at first sent excuses for not coming, but eventually presented himself with a train of five thousand Rajput soldiers. He had betrothed his daughter to a young nobleman, Berkhordar, without asking the royal permission, as a state servant should have done. Jahangir affected to be so enraged at this breach of etiquette that he had Berkhordar stripped and flogged with thorns in his presence, and his property confiscated. This gave Mohabat Khan a clear hint of the treatment that awaited himself.

Jahangir was at this time encamped on the

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Jhelum. He had sent his troops across and was waiting to follow at his leisure. Mohabat Khan took advantage of his isolation and with desperate daring seized the Emperor's person and conveyed him, in spite of his rage and entreaties to his own camp. But if Nur Jahan had by her foolish jealousy provoked the crime of the Afghan general, she redeemed her fault by the most consummate skill and courage. At first she led the army across the river to attack Mohabat Khan and his Rajput mercenaries but the attack was repulsed and she herself driven back to her own side of the stream.

Since violence had failed Nur Jahan fell back on her feminine artifices and they proved completely successful. She begged and obtained permission to join her husband in captivity and from her prison directed his efforts to restore the situation. On her advice he affected to be overjoyed that Mohabat Khan had released him from the control of her domineering brother Asaf Khan and even warned Mohabat Khan against the machinations of the Empress thus completely disarming the general's suspicions. While he was thus lulled to security Nur Jahan incited a body of royal guards to make a surprise

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attack on the Rajput mercenaries. Although the guards were beaten and their leaders executed, they killed so many of the Rajputs that Mohabat Khan's one dependable body of troops was greatly weakened. At the same time Nur Jahan's agents went through the army and secretly called on its leaders to rescue their Emperor. She also enlisted men from outside districts, limiting them to small parties so as to disarm suspicion.

Once her schemes had matured, she bade Jahangir press for a muster of the troops of all the jaghirdars present. When leave was granted, the Emperor advised Mohabat Khan not to be present at the review for fear of personal risk. The general suspected treachery, but with his Rajput mercenaries reduced in number, he was constrained to accept the advice. He contented himself with ordering his faithful adherents never to leave the Emperor's side. Such an order was easier to carry out in theory than in practice. When the Emperor appeared on the parade-ground the troops led by his own officers forced aside Mohabat Khan's men and formed a ring round Jahangir's person.

The Emperor was thus freed and Nur Jahan

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was once more supreme. She could not, however take full vengeance on Mohabat Khan for her brother Asaf Khan was his prisoner. She offered the rebel a free pardon provided that he helped her to oust Shah Jahan from the succession and substitute Prince Shahriyar but Mohabat Khan had had enough of intrigues. Instead of attacking Shah Jahan he joined him with such troops as he had left. Nevertheless the great Empress would have reached her goal, had not the fortune that had favoured her so long suddenly deserted her. A sudden chill caught by Jahangir when returning from Kashmir brought on an attack of asthma, and long before he reached Delhi the Emperor was dead. He was fifty-nine years of age.

Immediately all Nur Jahan's schemes crumbled to dust. Shahriyar was absent. Her own brother Asaf Khan, a devoted adherent of Shah Jahan seized the capital in his own name and recalled the prince. Escorted by Mohabat Khan Shah Jahan reached Delhi shortly afterwards and was duly crowned Emperor. Nevertheless no cruelty was shown to the fallen Empress. She was treated with great respect and granted a pension of £250 000 a year. She

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for her part met her misfortunes with courage. She affected to lose all interest in the affairs of this world, and dressed in white, the garb of a Mussulman widow, would talk of nothing but the virtues of her departed husband. She survived him for no less than nineteen years. She died in A D. 1646 leaving the memory of one who, rising from abject poverty, proved herself equal by her wit, her intellect, and her courage to the highest offices in the Moghul empire.

X

JIJABAI BHOSLE

To secure at once the reader's attention it is sufficient to say that Jijabai Bhosle was the mother of the immortal Shivaji. Her father was Lakhoji Jadhavrao who claimed descent from the ancient Yadav kings of Devgiri. He was the leading Maratha noble at the court of the Nizamshahi ruler of Ahmadnagar one of the kingdoms into which the Bahmani empire had broken up. Among Lakhoji's many dependants was one Maloji Bhosle who claimed descent from the Ranas of Udaipur. He had some wealth which so he said he had dug up at a spot shown him by the goddess Parwati. Maloji had originally been in the service of Vanangpal Nimbalkar of Phaltan, whose daughter Dipabai he married. Adventurous ambitious and not over-scrupulous Maloji left Phaltan for Ahmadnagar and with the help of Lakhoji Jadhav who befriended him obtained a small command in the royal service. Maloji was quite equal to his new post and won

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the full confidence of his government; but both he and his wife Dipabai were greatly concerned that their marriage had not been blessed with children. This difficulty, however, was overcome by a visit to the tomb of a Muslim saint Shah Sharif; and in the course of the next few years they became the parents of two sons, whom they called Shahaji and Sharifji in honour of the dead anchorite.

The elder boy grew into a very fine little lad, and when he was nine years old, Maloji took him to the house of his patron Lakhoji to celebrate the Holi festival. This is a period of great merriment when Hindus of all classes squirt red-coloured water over each other's clothes and faces. Among those present was Lakhoji Jadhav's daughter, Jijabai, a little girl a year younger than Shahaji. The two children mimicked the action of their parents and soaked each other in the red liquid. Lakhoji Jadhav, his heart softened by the gay scene and attracted by Shahaji's bright face and sturdy build, exclaimed. "What a fine pair they will make!"

Maloji had long cherished a secret ambition to marry his son Shahaji to his highborn patron's

daughter but had never dared approach the subject directly. He now saw his chance, and he at once drew the attention of the other guests to what Lakhoji had said asserting that the two children were now betrothed. At first Lakhoji denied that his words bore the meaning that Maloji sought to place on them. The other guests however were attracted by the idea and successfully pressed Lakhoji to promise that Shahaji should have Jijabai as his bride. The same evening Lakhoji told his wife Mhalsibai what had happened. The proud lady deeply resented the betrothal of her daughter to the son of her husband's dependant and insisted that Lakhoji should break off the betrothal. Next day Lakhoji invited Maloji to a dinner party but made no reference to the engagement of their children. Maloji declined the invitation unless Lakhoji undertook to announce the engagement at the dinner. Lakhoji smarting from Mhalsibai's reproaches refused to do so.

Maloji his ambitions thus thwarted, had no resource left but to invoke the aid of the goddess Bhawani of Tuljapur his family deity. He went to her shrine as a pilgrim and implored her help. That night he saw her in a dream. She promised

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him her constant help and assured him that he would obtain his heart's desire. Fortified by the vision, he returned to Ahmadnagar and challenged Lakhoji Jadhavrao to a duel. The king, Murtaza Nizam Shah II, heard of the quarrel. Duels were very frequent among the Ahmadnagar nobles, and the king, who had lost several of his best officers in duels, was anxious not to lose either of the two disputants, both of whom he valued highly. He ordered them to attend his court that he might arbitrate in their dispute. Maloji informed the king that Lakhoji had promised Jijabai to Shahaji, but had since broken the promise. Lakhoji in reply admitted the promise, but maintained that it had been made in jest and that the unequal standing of the two families made the match impossible.

The king disposed of the objection by promoting Maloji to the command of five thousand horse and by giving him the fortresses of Shivner and Chakan, the title of Raja, and the fiefs of Poona and Supa to support his new dignity. No further refusal was possible, and the marriage of Shahaji and Jijabai was celebrated with great pomp and ceremonial, it was honoured by the presence of the king in person.

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The first few years of Jijabai's marriage to the young Bhosle noble seem to have been happy enough. Three years after the wedding she bore her lord a son. He was called Sambhaji and became a great favourite of his father just as Shahaji had been of Maloji's. On April 10th 1627 after an interval of four years she became the mother of a second son at Shivner fort close to Junnar. Several stories are told to support the belief current even to-day that the baby boy was the incarnation of the god Shiva. A charming story finds a place in the chronicle known as the *Shedgavkar Bakhār*. One night Shahaji dreamt that he saw a Hindu anchorite clad in rags and smeared with yellow ashes who came to his bedside and put a mango in his hand "Share the fruit with your wife" said the apparition, and you will become the father of a son who will be the incarnation of the god Shiva. You must never force him to salute a Mussulman, and after his twelfth year you must leave him free to act as he pleases. When Shahaji awoke he found a mango in his hand. he visited his wife and shared it with her. Convinced that the anchorite of his dream was the god Shiva Shahaji gave his second son the name of

Shivaji, just as his own father had called him Shahaji after the Mussulman saint Shah Sharif.

But a dark and dangerous period began for the family while Shivaji was still a baby. Jijabai's father Lakhoji Jadhav had deserted the service of Ahmadnagar for that of Delhi. Shahaji had remained loyal to his king, and his conduct had led to a bitter quarrel between father-in-law and son-in-law. In 1629 Lakhoji was treacherously assassinated by Murtaza Nizam Shah II. Shortly afterwards one Mhaldar Khan, the Ahmadnagar governor of Trimbak, deserted to the Moghuls, and to win their goodwill and to punish Shahaji for his loyalty, he seized Jijabai and imprisoned her in the fort of Kondana. She managed, however, to hide Shivaji so successfully that the Moghuls never found him. The boy remained hidden until 1636, when Shahaji made terms with the Moghuls and Jijabai came out of prison. Even then he could not enjoy his father's protection. In 1630 Shahaji had contracted a second marriage with one Tukabai, a girl of the Mohite family. This family, although of ancient descent, was inferior in rank to that of Lakhoji Jadhavrao, and after her husband's new alliance

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Jijabai seems to have ceased all but formal relations with him.

In 1637 when Shivaji was ten years old the question of his marriage arose. For that purpose Jijabai made with her son the long journey to Bijapur. There he was married to Saibai daughter of Vithoji Newaskar. Even at this early age Shivaji behaved in so hostile a manner to the Mussulmans of Bijapur that Shahaji fearing for his own advancement, sent him and his mother out of Bijapur as soon as he could. He ordered Jijabai to reside at his fief of Poona and Supa, and to help her in its management he appointed a trusted Brahman officer named Dadaji Kondadev.

The unfortunate lady's task was no light one. Shahaji's fief had been ruined by Moghul incursions and private enemies. Its cultivators had fled and only a few fishermen remained. They lived on the fish that they caught in the Muta and Mula rivers but they could not possibly pay dues sufficient to keep Jijabai and her son. Still Jijabai preferred to starve in this remote estate than to live at Bijapur as the rival of a younger woman. With Dadaji's help she strove successfully to improve her lands. Rewards

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were offered for the slaughter of wild beasts, cultivators were attracted by low rents, and armed guards were hired to protect the crops. So rapidly did the fief improve that Shahaji added to it the Indapur and Baramati talukas of the Poona district, which had recently been bestowed on him by the Bijapur government.

Jijabai, freed from anxiety for their daily bread, had time to devote herself to her son's education. She built herself a house on the right bank of the Muta and gathered round Shivaji other boys of his own age. Three of these, Tanaji Malusre, Bajji Phasalkar, and Yesaji Kank, were in later years to win fame hardly less great than that of Shivaji. On Dadaji Kondadev's advice she not only had her son taught martial exercises, but sent him and his young friends to explore the country-side of the Western Ghats. He thus acquired a knowledge that was to be very useful to him in later days. During the winter evenings his mother told him tales of his ancestors, the Yadavs of Devgiri and the Ranas of Udaipur. These Dadaji Kondadev varied with stories of Danyadev and other saints of Pandharpur, or legends of the heroes of the Sanskrit epics. Jijabai wished to see her-

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son pious as well as brave. She taught him to pray constantly at the little village shrine which still may be seen in Poona, not far from the site of Jijabai's home. In this way she prepared her son for the tremendous task that awaited him that of expelling the Mussulman invaders and restoring the Hindu faith throughout Maharashtra.

It is impossible to say how far Jijabai influenced Shivaji's earlier successes but she was certainly in his confidence before he met Afzul Khan. Once he had decided to meet the Bijapur general's treachery with the counter-stroke that it merited he visited his mother Jijabai at first begged him not to challenge Afzul Khan at all but when Shivaji stood firm in his resolve and assured her that the Hindu gods angered at Afzul Khan's desecration of their shrines, would fight on his side she gave way. Like the high born Maratha lady that she was she blessed her gallant son and to spur him on said "Be careful my son be careful and take vengeance for Sambhaji your brother!" Sambhaji her eldest son, had been treacherously shot down in the Carnatic some time before.

On one occasion Jijabai's commonsense saved

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her brilliant son from his tendency to religious excess. Shivaji was a most devout Hindu and he was once so attracted by Tukaram's mode of life that he actually joined him and with him lived for some days the life of a religious devotee. Tukaram begged Shivaji to return to his secular duties, but his entreaties might not have availed, had Jijabai not sharply reprimanded her son. The blood of ancient kings boiled in the proud woman's veins at the thought that her son should give up a hero's life for that of a wandering beggar. Her rebuke succeeded where Tukaram's pleading might have failed, and Shivaji returned to his work as a warrior and a prince.

It is, however, with the fort of Sinhgad that Jijabai's name has been chiefly associated. This was one of the forts that Shivaji surrendered to Aurangzib before visiting Agra. It was only twelve miles from Poona and was thus a constant eyesore to the Maratha king. After Aurangzib had shown by a fresh act of treachery in 1669 that no treaties could bind him, Shivaji resolved to recover Sinhgad. To this action he was strongly urged by his mother. The ballad-writer Tulsidas Shahir has left a lively account of her share in the capture. One Monday

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morning she was sitting in her room in Pratapgad fort and was combing her hair with an ivory comb. As she looked eastwards, her eyes fell on Sinhgad. It was shining in the sun like a newly laid egg. The sight goaded her to fury. She told one of her servants to ride to Raygad and call Shivaji to her even if he had to rise from dinner without washing his hands. Shivaji obeyed his mother's summons and reached Pratapgad as soon as his black mare Krishna could carry him. Jijabai at once challenged her son to a game of dice. This she won through the help of the goddess Parwati and she insisted that as a forfeit Shivaji should hand over Sinhgad to her. In vain her son protested but her threat to put her curse upon him if he did not comply forced him to action. He ordered his faithful lieutenant Tanaji Malusre to storm the fort, which the latter did although he fell himself in the moment of victory.

Probably the proudest hour in this great lady's life was the coronation of her son in Raygad fort. Although Shivaji had for long been a ruling monarch his position was anomalous. He enjoyed the hereditary title of Raja conferred on his grandfather by the Nizamshahi king but

that dynasty had long ceased to exist. He had been confirmed in his title by the Delhi Emperor, but as a result of Aurangzib's endless intrigues Shivaji had renounced his fealty to the Moghul throne. It was, therefore, impossible for the king's followers to say whence Shivaji derived his authority. It was a difficulty that demanded a solution, so the king consulted his secretary and his mother. It was agreed that his best course was to have himself crowned by the Benares priest, Gaga Bhat, who happened to be at Paithan on the Godavari. Gaga Bhat, after consultation with other priests in Benares, agreed to preside at the coronation, and in the presence of Jijabai and thousands of other spectators Shivaji was crowned king.

The preliminary ceremonial was most elaborate and lasted several days. It seems to have greatly tired the ageing Jijabai. The proud lady, however, would not admit fatigue. It was only when the coronation had been duly completed that she agreed to rest; but before she could rid herself of her weariness she was suddenly attacked by a violent fever. On the fourth day of her illness, she realised her case to be hopeless. She distributed much of her wealth among the

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Brahman community of Pratapgad, and on the fifth day she died. Her body was burnt at Raygad. After the period of mourning had elapsed her ashes were, at Shivaji's command, conveyed to Allahabad and there cast into the confluence of the Ganges and the Jamna.

So passed this great and noble lady. On Shahaji's death she had wished as a high born Maratha woman to follow her husband through the flames but at her son's entreaty she reluctantly abandoned her design. She was amply rewarded for she lived to see Shivaji the greatest prince in southern India.

XI

AHALYABAI HOLKAR

Malhar Rao Holkar, one of the greatest soldiers of the Maratha confederacy, was of lowly origin. His ancestors were *dhangars* or herdsmen by caste, and first lived in the village of Waphgaon. Afterwards they moved to Hol, on the banks of the Nira river, forty miles from Poona and within the limits of the Phaltan state. Until this migration they had called themselves Virkar. Thenceforward they called themselves Holkar or men of Hol village. Malhar Rao's father held the office of Chaugula or superior village servant. He died when his son was still an infant. Malhar Rao's mother took her baby to her own village of Talode in Khandesh, where he was brought up by her brother Bhojraj. One day the child was lying asleep in the shade of a tree. When his mother came to fetch him home, she thought she saw a large cobra protecting his face from the sun's rays with its hood. Both she and her brother agreed that this strange incident foretold

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the little boy's future greatness. When Malhar Rao grew to manhood Bhojraj enlisted him in the troop of horse which he commanded under Kantaji Bande. The youth soon distinguished himself by his courage and military skill and in time rose to be the most important feudatory of the Chitpawan Peshwas.

Malhar Rao chose Ahalyabai Shinde born in the year 1733 as a wife for his son Khande Rao. The marriage was a very happy one but it had a tragic ending. In 1754 Khande Rao Holkar was killed at the siege of Kumbher a fortress some eight miles from Bhartpur leaving to his widow the care of one son Male Rao and one daughter Muktabai. At first Ahalyabai's grief was so profound that, like many another high-born Hindu lady she wished to join her husband through the flames of his funeral pyre. From this terrible resolve she was with difficulty dissuaded by Malhar Rao himself. He begged her to live and look after her son and daughter the hopes of the house of Holkar. He also dwelt so persuasively on his own loneliness that at last he extorted from Ahalyabai a promise not to commit *sati*.

In 1765 the great Malhar Rao died. The uncle

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of the Peshwa Madhav Rao I, Raghunath Rao, who was in command of the Poona forces in Central India, conferred on Male Rao, the son of Khande Rao and grandson of the dead prince, the sovereignty over his grandfather's possessions. The youth only lived to enjoy his honours nine months and during that time did nothing to deserve them. He was of a totally unbalanced mind and loved to do all that he could to thwart his mother's orders. Her piety led her to favour Brahmans, and much money was given away in charity. Male Rao was aware of this, and used to put scorpions at the bottom of the pots in which the charity money was kept. The greedy anchorites on seeing the coins thrust their hands in to the pots, hoping to fill them with coins. In this way they disturbed the scorpions, who promptly stung the anchorites, much to the unholy joy of the young prince. At other times he would hide scorpions in the saintly men's clothes and slippers, and was filled with glee as the men jumped about in agony. Ahalyabai openly lamented that instead of being a hero like his father and grandfather, Male Rao was a devil in human shape.

The youth's end showed that he was more fit for a lunatic asylum than a throne. Hearing

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that an embroidery worker employed in the palace, had had a secret love affair with one of Ahalyabai's servant girls he promptly had him killed. After his death he found that the gossip to which he had listened was entirely false. He remembered too late that the tailor had protested his innocence and had threatened to haunt the prince if his life was not spared. He became quite convinced that the murdered embroidery worker's spirit had entered his body and his insane ravings persuaded Ahalyabai herself that this was the case. She sat by her sick son's bedside arguing with the evil spirit and trying to bribe it to leave Male Rao's body. She offered to build the spirit a temple and instal it with due ceremony and to settle an estate on the dead man's family but the demon was incorruptible. Always it answered in the voice of Male Rao. "He slew me though I was innocent, and I will have his life." After a prolonged delirium the unhappy prince died. The poor mother was thus left alone for her daughter Muktabai had been married to Nathoba Panse and was living with her husband.

The first minister of the Holkar state was a Brahman named Gangadhar Jaswant. He urged

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that Ahalyabai should adopt some infant kinsman of the dead ruler. This proposal has been severely censured by English and Maratha historians, but there was nothing unusual in it. As for the *nazarana* which he offered to Raghunath Rao to confirm such an adoption, it was always exacted in India by the suzerain state. However, the high-spirited Ahalyabai refused point-blank the minister's advice. She sounded her army chiefs and her brother rulers, the Bhosle of Nagpur, the Gaikwad of Baroda, the Dabhade of Talegaon and Madhav Rao Sindia. Finding that they favoured her plan, she declared that she and she alone would rule the state of Holkar. At first Raghunath Rao considered her attitude hostile to the Peshwa's rights, but when it became clear that the other great Maratha rulers would look jealously on any interference from Poona, he hesitated to act. Eventually the Peshwa Madhav Rao I, to whom Ahalyabai had privately appealed, sent Raghunath Rao a despatch, recognizing her claims. Raghunath Rao was bound to accept his nephew's decision and withdrew his forces. Ahalyabai then showed by her conduct that she was worthy to govern her father-in-law's dominion. She entertained

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Raghunath Rao most hospitably at Indore and detailed a strong contingent of Holkar's troops to escort him back to Poona. In command of them was a very distant kinsman of Malhar Rao namely Tukoji Holkar whose descendants now rule in Malwa. At Ahalyabai's request the Peshwa invested Tukoji with the command of the Maratha troops in Central India and Ahalyabai no doubt realising that Gangadhar's suggestion about an adoption had been quite reasonable re-appointed him as her first minister.

The further government of the Holkar state then the largest independent principality in India was carried on by a triumvirate Ahalyabai Tukoji and Gangadhar. Tukoji was at the head of the armed forces and with their help he collected the revenues of the Gangetic valley and the tribute of the Rajput states. Gangadhar remained as he had always been, the head of the civil administration. Over all was Ahalyabai. Nor did she merely reign she ruled. She retained in her own hands the Holkar treasure which amounted to several millions and she directly controlled the revenues of Central India. She had private estates that brought her an

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income of four lakhs annually, while she scrutinized the public expenditure with the utmost care and severity. Labours such as hers required ample time, and Sir John Malcolm has given the following time-table of her working day. She rose an hour before daybreak to say her morning prayers and perform the ceremonies necessary to a devout Hindu. She then listened for a fixed period, while a priest read to her from the *Puranas* or other sacred works, and afterwards distributed alms and gave food to a number of Brahmans. Not till then did she think of breaking her fast. As a *dhangar* or herdsman by caste, she was entitled to eat any meat save the flesh of the cow, nevertheless she was a strict vegetarian. After a frugal meal she again turned to prayer and finally took a short rest, which she had assuredly earned. At two o'clock she appeared punctually in her Darbar and stayed there transacting business until six in the evening. The next three hours were spent in eating a light supper and in renewed religious exercises. At nine o'clock she began again the disposal of official business and worked until eleven, when she retired to her own apartments. Austere as this mode of life was, she made it

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still harder by her strict observance of religious fasts and festivals

Tukoji Holkar paid the greatest reverence to the queen. Although he was older than she was, he always addressed her as Mother. She treated him with courtesy and indulgence, but did not fail to bring him sharply to book, if any of his actions seemed to her unjust. Sir John Malcolm has given a specific instance of this. A certain *savkar* or merchant called Devchand died without issue. As his property had been acquired by his own efforts his wife was the heir under Hindu law. Tukoji however like most military commanders was in urgent need of money. Some male relatives of the deceased Devchand furious at not inheriting his wealth suggested to Tukoji that it was the state practice in such cases to take half the property for the treasury for this ancient form of death-duty did actually exist in certain parts of Central India. Tukoji thought the suggestion excellent and appropriated half of Devchand's possessions to the purchase of military supplies. Devchand's widow appealed to Ahalyabai who at once gave her a dress of honour signifying that she was her husband's sole heir ordered Tukoji to refund whatever

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money he had taken, and bade him march out of the neighbourhood of Indore and not trouble her city with any more improper exactions. Tukoji obeyed without hesitation, and thenceforward Ahalyabai was revered by the citizens of her capital more as a goddess than as a queen.

In the ordinary way this great lady's administration was the most indulgent imaginable, but she could on occasion be as severe as she was usually merciful. She endeavoured at first to reclaim by kindness the Gond brigands on the Narbada and the wild Bhil marauders of the mountains. Unhappily they mistook her kindness for weakness and robbed and plundered more cruelly than ever. She soon proved to them their mistake. A strong Maratha force invaded their fastnesses, overcame their resistance, and put so many of their leaders to death that the survivors sued piteously for mercy.

In her foreign policy Ahalyabai derived great support from her friendship with Madhav Rao Sindia, the ruling prince of Gwalior. Wisely these two Maratha chieftains supported each other against all comers, with the result that during the rule of Ahalyabai her frontiers were only once threatened. Ursi, the Rana of Udaipur,

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pur thought to conquer Rampur. He set up one of his kinsmen as a claimant and supported his claims with a Rajput army. At that time the bulk of the Holkar forces were engaged in the Deccan and the time seemed favourable to the Rana's ambitions. Ahalyabai, however, rapidly gathered a considerable body of troops. Led by Sharifbhai, a Musulman general in her service, they completely defeated the Sisodias at Palsora. This disaster to his clansmen so affected the Rana that he instantly sued for peace. This was granted on condition that he abandoned all claims on Rampur.

Sparing in expenditure on herself or her household, the queen spent very large sums on temples, most of them designed with exquisite taste, in and around Indore. She also made lavish gifts to distant shrines, such as that of Jagannath in Bengal, Dwarka in Kathiawar, Rameshwaram near Cape Comorin and Kedar-nath amid the snows of the Himalayas. She daily fed the poor; she gave generous sums during the annual festivals to the lowest classes. During the summer months she posted watercarriers on the main roads to supply travellers with water, and during the winter she made vast distributions

of warm clothes not only to her own household but to all the indigent of Indore. The animal kingdom as well as human beings benefited by her generosity. She reserved the crops of some of her fields for the birds, and she detailed men to take water to the oxen working at the plough. Sir John Malcolm once remarked to a Brahman, as he has told us in his *Memoir of Central India*, that Ahalyabai had wasted the Holkar treasures in this indiscriminate liberality. The reply was so admirable that I quote it in full.

“Could Ahalyabai by spending on an army twice what she did on charity and good works have preserved her country for above thirty years in a state of profound peace, while she rendered her subjects happy and herself adored? No person doubts the sincerity of her piety, but if she had merely possessed worldly wisdom, she could have devised no means so admirably qualified to effect her object. I was in one of the principal offices in Poona,” continued the Brahman, “during the last years of her administration and know well what feelings were excited by the mere mention of her name. Among the princes of her own nation, it would have been looked upon as sacrilege to have become her

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enemy or indeed not to have defended her against any hostile attempt. She was considered by all in the same light. The Nizam of the Deccan and Tipu Sultan granted her the same respect as the Peshwa and Mahomedans joined with Hindus in prayers for her long life and prosperity "

The closing years of this admirable lady were darkened by undeserved misfortune Her daughter Muktabai Panse lost her only son and then her husband In spite of Ahalyabai's agonized entreaties Muktabai declared that she was resolved to burn herself on her husband's body Ahalyabai humbled herself in the dust before her daughter and besought her by all she revered not to leave her mother alone and desolate upon earth Kindly but firmly Muktabai answered

You are old my mother and a few years will end your pious life. My only child and husband have gone and when you follow them life, I feel, will be insupportable but the opportunity for ending it with honour will then have passed."

The unfortunate queen had the courage to witness her daughter's *sati*. She walked in the procession and stood near the pyre supported by

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two Brahmans, one on each side. She gazed in silence on the terrible scene until the first sight of the flames robbed her of all self-control; she shrieked and struggled to get free that she might drag her daughter from the blazing pyre. The Brahmans held her fast until Muktabai was dead. Then they took the unconscious mother back to her palace. When the charred bones of the dead princess were cast into the Narbada, Ahalyabai was sufficiently recovered to bathe in the sacred river. Returning home, she fasted for three whole days in silence. Later she sought consolation in erecting a beautiful temple to honour the spirits of those whom she had loved and lost.

In 1795 Ahalyabai died at the age of sixty, worn out by sorrow, penances, and toil. She was very thin and had never been beautiful, but her innate goodness gave her a charming expression. A story is told that the lovely but wicked Anandibai, the wife of Raghunath Rao and mother of Baji Rao II, the last Peshwa, once sent one of her maids to report whether Ahalyabai was fair to look on or not. The girl said on her return: "Ahalyabai has not beautiful features, but a heavenly light is on her countenance." This information satisfied Anandibai. So long as

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Ahalyabai's looks did not rival her own. Anandibai cared nothing for the Holkar queen's goodness, which she had no wish to emulate.

Ahalyabai seems to have been devoid of vanity. She observed strictly the practices of the orthodox Hindu widow. She wore no jewels and only plain white clothes. Her life was strictly virtuous and flattery she scornfully rejected. A Brahman author it is related wrote a book in her praise and got leave to read it to her. With royal courtesy she heard him to the end then observing "I am a weak and sinful woman and deserve no such fine words of praise," she ordered the book to be thrown into the Narbada river and took no further notice of the author. Indeed her striking qualities cannot be described better than in the words of Sir John Malcolm.

In the most sober view that can be taken of her character she certainly appears within her limited sphere to have been one of the purest and most exemplary rulers that ever existed and she affords a striking example of the practical benefit a mind may receive from performing worldly duties under a deep sense of responsibility to its Creator."

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On Ahalyabai's death her kinsman, the loyal Tukoji, succeeded to the principality and ruled it on the lines that his patroness had laid down. Unhappily he died only two years after her death, leaving two legitimate sons Kashi Rao and Mulhar Rao, and two illegitimate sons, Jaswant Rao and Etoji. Ahalyabai and Tukoji had both wished that Kashi Rao, a dwarf and feeble intellect, should carry on the civil government, while Mulhar Rao, a splendid young prince, should command the Holkar armies. This arrangement not unnaturally failed to satisfy anyone. Both the legitimate brothers wanted to be made sole ruler, and intrigues began which led to the death of Mulhar Rao in battle and the exile of Kashi Rao. Eventually it was the son of Jaswant Rao who refounded the house of Holkar.

XII

KRISHNA KUMARI OF MEWAR

It has been my high privilege to sketch on other pages¹ however imperfectly the glorious days of Mewar. Unhappily the times in which Krishna Kumari lived were the blackest that ever darkened that splendid kingdom. The decline of the Moghul empire strangely enough helped in no way the Sisodia Ranas. Other Rajput chiefs such as those of Marwar and Jaipur secured fragments of the dissolving fabric but the Sisodias unchanged by time or circumstance, refused to extend their frontiers beyond those fixed by the founder of the state, the great Bappa Rawal. They thus never increased their crown lands, the main source of their power and so they sank in relative importance, compared with the other the chiefs of Rajputana.

That however was not the only evil. In old days the rival clans of Sakhtawats and Chanda-wats had fought for the honour of leading the

See Tales of the Indian Cavaliers (Macmillan and Co. Ltd.)

vanguard of Mewar; but as the royal power weakened the turbulent chiefs fought each other for the headship of the state. From the south came an even greater peril. The Maratha confederacy, checked at Panipat, had, under the great Madhav Rao I, resumed their northern march. In 1782 the Emperor Shah Alam resigned into the hands of Sindia the command of his army and the control of all his territories in return for a handsome yearly grant of money. Sindia found that the upkeep of the Emperor's troops and the payment of his allowance was more than he could afford, so he sought to exact tribute from the states of Rajputana. The Rajput chiefs at first defended themselves successfully, but in the end were overcome by Maratha armies trained in European tactics by Sindia's French general Benoit de Boigne. The defeats of the royal armies and the plunder of the Sisodia cities led to worse anarchy inside the realm. During the long minority of Rana Bhimsing the Chandawats seized the greater part of the royal demesne. When Bhimsing drove them from office and appointed a Sakhtawat as his chief minister, the Chandawat leader murdered his rival in the king's antechamber.

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It was in the midst of misfortunes such as these that Bhimsing's daughter grew to maturity. At the age of fifteen her beauty was a byword through northern India, and as a child she had been betrothed to the heir of Jodhpur. The young prince had died and his younger brother Mansing had succeeded to the throne. Her hand was thus free and Jagatsing chief of Jaipur asked for it in marriage. The Jaipur prince had no high reputation but Mewar had fallen on such evil days that Rana Bhimsing accepted Jagatsing's proposal and he and Krishna Kumari were betrothed.

In ordinary circumstances marriage would soon have followed the betrothal but Mansing of Jodhpur wishing for an excuse to interfere in the affairs of Mewar claimed Krishna Kumari's hand for himself. His grounds were extraordinary. The princess he asserted had been betrothed not to an individual but to the head of the Marwar state. His brother had, it is true passed away but there was still a living chief of Marwar. Mansing himself and he alone was the fitting husband of the beautiful princess. This ridiculous plea was supported by Sindia. He cared little who won the lady's

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hand, but he was glad of an excuse to humble the chief of Jaipur, who had refused to pay his tribute. At first, under the threat of Sindia's guns, the Rana broke his daughter's betrothal with Jagatsing and affianced her to the Maharaja of Marwar. A war ensued between Marwar and Jaipur, which the former won, chiefly through the treachery of an unprincipled mercenary, named Amir Khan. Sindia now demanded that the Sisodia princess should be handed over to his ally or put to death.¹

The alternative was never seriously contemplated by the Maratha, but was intended merely to emphasize his demand. The Rana had in the meantime again changed his mind and was bent on keeping his promise to Jagatsing, to whose help he had sent troops in the war with Marwar. He refused to hand over his daughter to the Rathor even though the Maratha troops marched to his very gates.

Then a dreadful thing happened. Sindia returned to Central India, leaving Amir Khan in command of his forces in Rajputana. The

¹ Tod has hinted that Sindia himself sought to marry Krishna Kumari and was embittered by the Rana's refusal. I can find no evidence to support this theory, and on the face of it, it seems improbable.

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low-bred mercenary took advantage of the situation and peremptorily demanded the surrender of Krishna Kumari to himself. He had quarrelled he said with the Rathor Mansing and he would honour the Sisodia house by marrying the princess himself. Just as Akbar had wedded ladies of the Jodhpur house, he too would condescend to take to his side a Rajput wife.

This last turn of events was too much for the Rana. His ancestors had refused to bestow their daughters on the Emperors of Delhi and he was now called upon to give his beautiful child to an Afghan adventurer. He remembered how Sindia had faced him with the choice of either surrendering his daughter to Mansing or destroying her. Now came the proposal that he should make her the wife of a Musulman. In any circumstances her death was better than such degradation. He sought the counsel of a kinsman Ajitsing who acted as the agent of Jodhpur. Ajitsing agreed that it would be better that Krishna Kumari should die than that she should be married to Amir Khan. In vain other nobles pleaded that the Rana should once more resist to the last and sustain a siege of his capital, for as

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Ajitsing pointed out, the times had changed. French cannon and French-trained artillerymen would soon batter down the strongest fortress in Rajasthan. The Rana and his nobles would fall on the battlefield, and the princess would still have to perish in the fire, just as Padmani and her women had done in former days to escape the Emperor Ala-ud-din. Better that the princess should die alone. She was the cause of the quarrel, and if she were dead, peace would be once more restored. This cowardly and abominable advice found favour with the distracted Rana. He came to think that he owed his duty to his country rather than to his daughter, and he decided that his beautiful princess must die to save Mewar. He could not bring himself to carry out his own decree; yet, as she was of royal blood, she could only be killed by one of royal blood.

The Rana sent for a distant cousin, Maharaja Daulatsing, and told him that it was his sacred task to save his country by killing Krishna Kumari; and Ajitsing put forward the same arguments that had convinced the Rana. The stout heart of the Sisodia noble recoiled in horror from the deed, while his plain honest

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mind scorned the perverse fallacies of A

Never!" he exclaimed. Accursed be the tongue that commands such a deed! Dust be on allegiance if I am thus to preserve it!"

Unmolested he strode from the royal palace.

The Rana then appealed to his half brother Jawandas and implored him to put Krishna Kumari to death and so save Mewar. Reluctantly Jawanda accepted the odious mission and entered the palace with a dagger in hand. But when he met the beautiful maiden face to face he was won by her youthful loveliness and his heart failed him. He dropped the dagger and returned to the throne-room his mission unfulfilled. The princess's mother had, however, witnessed the scene. While Krishna Kumari with a lady's courage and resignation readily accepted her fate the shrieks and curses of her mother, a princess of Gujarat, resounded through the palace. Since it had become clear that no high born Sisodia would carry out the Rana's orders the infatuated chief resolved not to stab but to poison her. He ordered some palace maids to prepare and give to the princess a cup of poison. The mother stormed and wept when she offered the goblet to Krishna Kumari but she

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on learning that it was by her father's command, bowed and drank it, offering up a prayer for his life and prosperity. Turning to her mother she said

“Why afflict yourself, my mother, if the sorrows of my life be shortened? I fear not to die! Am I not your daughter? Why should I fear death? We are marked out for sacrifice from our birth, we scarcely enter the world but to be sent out again; let me thank my father that I have lived so long!”

It seems likely that the palace maids wilfully omitted to put poison in the draught, for it had no effect. Two other poisoned cups were prepared, but proved equally innocuous. At last Ajitsing prepared a fourth cup, this time of opium and water. Unmoved, Krishna Kumari drank it as she lay down to rest. She went to sleep and awoke no more.

When the Sisodia nobles heard of the murder, their fury and horror passed all bounds. Sangramsing, the Sakhtawat leader, burst into the royal presence and poured out abuse on Ajitsing's head.

“Thou stain on the Sisodia race, unworthy of Rajput blood, dust be on thy head, since thou

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must cover us with shame! Die you childless and your name die with you!" Bursting from the palace he mounted his horse called together a few score retainers charged Amir Khan's army in position and fell on the battlefield. The mother of Krishna Kumari frantic with grief starved herself until she followed her child to the burning-ground.

Nevertheless strange as it may seem the noble princess's death saved Mewar. Sindia was so shocked at the awful consequences of his thoughtless threat that he withdrew his army from the walls of Udaipur. Amir Khan made no further attempt to win a bride from the Sisodia house confined himself to sneering at the far-famed Rajput valour and departed with Sindia's troops to Central India. Ajitsing suffered the full effects of Sangram's curse. His wife and two sons died within a month of Krishna Kumari's death and Mewar was never again misled by the counsels of a coward. One source of its regeneration sprang from an unexpected quarter. Shortly after the murder of the valiant princess a young English officer named James Tod was present on duty at the Rana's court. He conceived so warm an admiration for

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Mewar that he resolved, if it was ever within his power, to restore its greatness Ten years later his chance came Sent as the Company's agent to the court of Udaipur, he found the city ruined and the land desolate With almost inspired energy he set to work to restore it Nevertheless his efforts would have been in vain had he not been helped by the memory of the dead princess When a truculent robber baron refused to restore crown lands that had been unjustly seized, Tod as a last resort recalled how Krishna Kumari had died for Mewar The remonstrance had its effect and the lands were at once given back For twenty years Tod laboured thus, and when in 1822 he left for England, the Rana of Mewar had once more resumed his old place among the rulers of India By writing *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* James Tod built for himself a monument more enduring than brass, yet his work as agent was greater still For to a land utterly desolate he brought back, with Krishna Kumari's invisible help, the ancient glory and more than the ancient happiness of Mewar